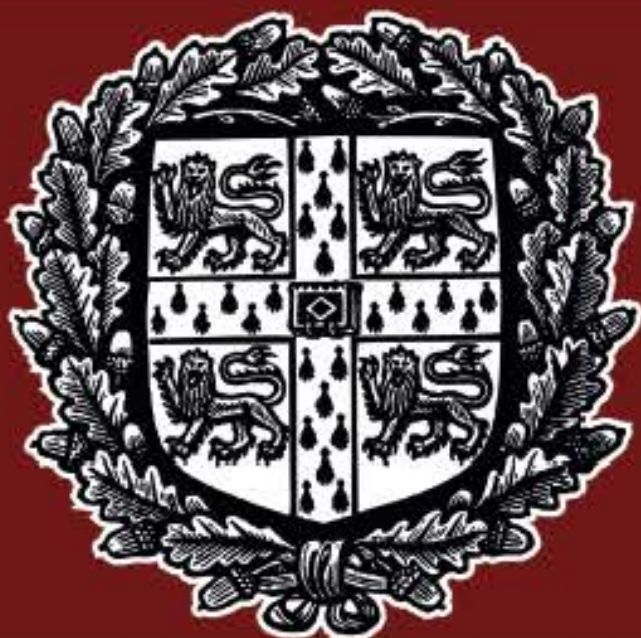


THE CAMBRIDGE
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF
BYZANTIUM



EDITED BY
ANTHONY KALDELLIS AND
NIKETAS SINIOSSOGLU

THE CAMBRIDGE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF BYZANTIUM

This volume brings the field of Byzantine intellectual history into being. Shifting focus from the cultural, social, and economic study of Byzantium to the life and evolution of ideas in their context, it provides an authoritative history of intellectual endeavors from late antiquity to the fifteenth century. At its heart lie the transmission, transformation, and shifts of Hellenic, Christian, and Byzantine ideas and concepts as exemplified in diverse aspects of intellectual life, from philosophy, theology, and rhetoric to astrology, astronomy, and politics. Case-studies introduce the major players in Byzantine intellectual life, and particular emphasis is placed on the reception of ancient thought and its significance for secular as well as religious modes of thinking and acting. New insights are offered regarding controversial, understudied, or promising topics of research, such as philosophy and medical thought in Byzantium and intellectual exchanges with the Arab world.

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INTRODUCTION

ANTHONY KALDELLIS AND NIKETAS SINOSSOGLOU

Ideas have lives of their own. Their genealogies, careers, mutations, and legacies form historical patterns and ontologies different from those of individual human beings and societies, though they are linked to them in manifold ways. Ideally, the history of ideas should be studied diachronically and across the boundaries of states, cultures, and periods, these being the most important categories that artificially break up intellectual history.¹ Yet the questions of how the Byzantines interacted with ideas which they received from earlier periods, and how they developed ideas of their own, are occluded in existing scholarship. It is typical for diachronic studies to jump from antiquity to the Renaissance, reinforcing a particular concept of the genealogy of the “west.” Intellectual histories of the medieval west rarely include the Byzantine world,² even though the western tradition draws from the same Greek, Roman, and Christian sources that were also part of the Byzantine patrimony. Moreover, within Byzantine Studies intellectual history is probably the least developed subfield, lacking titles to its name and definition in relation to other inflections of historical inquiry. We have therefore chosen the format of an *Intellectual History of Byzantium* as a preliminary step toward rectifying this imbalance: first, to provide the resources with which more integrated cross-cultural, diachronic, and analytical narratives may one day be written, and, second, to spur the growing interest in Byzantine intellectual history as a more or less distinct discipline.

WHY BYZANTINE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IS IMPORTANT

Not only did the Byzantines develop a vibrant and complex intellectual culture for themselves, they can justly claim an important place in the intellectual history of the world. In an ideal world driven by genuine intellectual curiosity, cultures would be regarded as fascinating and worthy of study for their own sake. But as we live in more utilitarian times, it is necessary to list some of the contributions that Byzantium made to cultures

¹ Moyn and Sartori 2013. ² Colish 1997: 113–128 is an honorable exception.

other than itself, and also why it is important for historians of ideas to study it. This will also reveal some of the ways in which it is interesting in its own right.

Byzantium preserved, selected, and shaped the canon of the Greek classics. It is regularly acknowledged – even if only grudgingly – that the Byzantines were responsible for preserving almost all ancient Greek literature that we have today. Some texts survived through translations in other languages, stone inscriptions, or papyri, but they were a tiny minority compared to the volumes painstakingly copied out by Byzantine scribes over the duration of a millennium. When we look at our “classical libraries” (the Loeb, Oxford Classical Texts, or Teubner collections) we are in fact looking at a Byzantine classical library. In terms of the totality of surviving premodern Greek literature, our classical libraries are only a part of what the Byzantines chose to keep, in addition to their own writings that we artificially excise from our corpus of “classical Greek literature.” This, in turn, is only a subset of everything that was ever written in Greek, a great deal of which was lost because the Byzantines allowed it to lapse according to their confessional, curricular, and ideological priorities. Their own writings reveal those priorities. Yet the discipline of Classics has, to make an understatement, not been receptive to Byzantium and its texts. Most classicists fail to recognize that the Byzantines were their kindred spirits, indeed their forebears, when it comes to the study of the Greek classics. For the Byzantines did not preserve ancient literature for the benefit of future scholars in a more enlightened western society: they preserved the texts for their own use and benefit. Moreover, they did not merely *preserve* ancient literature: they made choices in selecting what to preserve and developed new textual technologies for that purpose. Thus, they played an active role in shaping the canon. Modernity may, in its ignorance, take it for granted as representing “the Greeks,” but in fact it represents a Byzantine vision of the Greeks too.³ To a large degree we are bound by Byzantine choices, we study and love the texts they did, and often unknowingly see Greek antiquity through their eyes. Therefore, we need to understand their point of view. This volume contributes to that goal. Many of its chapters show how antiquity was the starting point of Byzantine thinking in many fields.

Byzantium is our first point of contact with ancient Greek thought. For centuries scholarship has labored to create the illusion of unmediated access to the classical past, but it is largely a process of artificially wrenching our ancient heritage out of its Byzantine context, stripping it of Byzantine residues and accretions, and then claiming authenticity for the reconstructed product. Yet in material terms, the closest we can usually come

³ Kaldellis 2010.

to an ancient text is a Byzantine manuscript that dates after the tenth century. It is unwise to believe that those books are “pure” media that preserve classics immaculate. Byzantium was responsible for crucial changes to the textual technologies of learning, including the universal adoption of the codex form, the invention of minuscule script, and the concomitant need to “transliterate” all texts, leading to a bottle-neck of selection and loss. Texts were adapted, selected, anthologized, excerpted, abridged, and interpolated. Ancient commentaries, scholia, grammatical aids, and dictionaries were broken up and recombined with new Byzantine material that is often impossible to tell apart.

Modern historicism has tended to treat texts as anchored so firmly in original contexts that one can easily ignore their later textual settings, however important those settings may have been to the (possibly dominant) reading and perception of these texts throughout most of their history . . . Cultural histories thus tend to be written as narratives of a succession of discrete moments of creative acts of composition.⁴

But classicists who really want to know where their texts come from and what their words mean will inevitably end up dealing with the likes of Photios, the *Souda*, the *Etymologika*, and other Byzantine texts and authors for which their training has rarely prepared them.

Byzantium created the Orthodox tradition. Christianity began as one among the many cults of the ancient Mediterranean, but it became a world religion only in early Byzantium, specifically in the eastern provinces of the late Roman world. Its doctrines, theology, intellectual traditions, norms, and governing institutions took shape and were codified between the fourth and the sixth century, first in Greek and then derivatively in Latin and other languages. Thus, if we include early Byzantium within our scope, it is fair to say that Christianity in most of its forms after 300 CE has a Byzantine matrix. This volume, however, focuses on the later phases of Byzantine intellectual life, after 600 CE. By that point, Christianity in both east and west was set on variant trajectories that would lead away from its distinctively Byzantine configuration. But the latter subsequently became the crucible for the entire Orthodox world. The impact of Byzantine Orthodoxy on the intellectual life of the cultures that accepted Christianity from the eastern empire, from modern Greece to Russia, cannot be underestimated. This volume, then, charts the fundamental modes and orders of Byzantine Orthodoxy as they emerged after the formative period of late antiquity. They include, for example, the distinctively Byzantine theology of icons, the differential reception of Plato and Aristotle, the tense and conditional use of the Greek

⁴ Wagschal 2015: 27.

philosophical tradition (in the original), and the positions that emerged through contact with the rapidly changing west after the eleventh century, and also in the wake of Hesychasm.

Byzantium was a major player in its time. In addition to looking vertically at its past and future, we must also look at Byzantium horizontally in terms of its neighboring cultures. Today Byzantine Studies may be a relatively small field in comparison to its western medieval and early Islamic peers, but Byzantium, in its own time, was a major intellectual interlocutor and conduit for its neighbors. This was true not only for its art and the prestige of its imperial tradition, both of which were widely imitated and so have been studied, but also in the realms of ideas and scholarship. Byzantine exports included its unique access to the Greek tradition in the original language and its Orthodox inflection of Christianity, but there are also signs that medieval Europe, both western and eastern, accessed aspects of ancient Roman tradition not directly from Latin but from their Greek versions kept alive in Roman Byzantium. Let us not forget that Roman law was fixed for posterity by Justinian and, before it was revived in the west in the late eleventh century, it remained in force in the east through its Greek translations. We hope that this volume will provide a convenient point of entry for scholars in these “adjacent” fields who wish to learn more, and a starting point for further discussion of intellectual relations. Only a few chapters here are devoted to cross-cultural debates and contacts, but making the history of the Byzantine tradition more accessible *in general* is a necessary first step if we are all to engage in more interdisciplinary synthesis and dialogue.

Byzantium was a fascinating and unique combination of intellectual traditions in its own right. It was the only postclassical culture in the history of the world that (a) spoke and wrote in Greek and therefore had immediate access to the textual basis of ancient Hellenism; (b) was Orthodox, which meant that it had immediate access to all foundational Christian texts (the Gospels, Church Fathers, Acts of the Councils) and, also, was the first which had to work out a way of including selected pagan texts and concepts within an exclusive Christian framework; and (c) it also retained a strongly felt Roman identity and approaches to government, politics, and law, which were more or less modified (or only inflected) to accommodate Christian notions. No other society has ever been Greek, Christian, and Roman in this way, making Byzantium a fascinating laboratory for cultural and intellectual fusion, reception, combination, and reinvention.

WHAT IS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY?

An ancient Platonist would be surprised at the way in which modern historians view and treat ideas. Whereas Platonic ideas are timeless and

changeless, modern scholars of Platonism typically assume that even Plato's ideas changed over time. The paradox stems from a homonymous use of the word *idea*. Plato's ideas are Forms that transcend history and the world of change, but Plato's ideas about the Ideas *qua* Forms do not. The former are by definition unhistorical; the latter exist only within history. By extension, the reception of Plato in Byzantium amounts to different elaborations and applications of Plato's philosophy to politics, epistemology, and ontology that diversely reflect the changing interests of pagan, Christian, "heretical," or idiosyncratically "other" authors.

The distinction between the belief in ostensibly timeless entities (as Ideas) and the systematic study of ideas as reflecting shifts in human thought is typical of modernity. Classicists might point out that Aristotle and the ancient doxographers were already moving in that direction when they classified and commented on the views of ancient philosophers, but the history of ideas and concepts emerged properly as a distinct field with Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), and French Enlightenment thinkers such as Pierre Bayle (who attempted a history of "the human spirit"). Ties between original philosophy and the history of philosophy remained strong and fundamental philosophical questions gained new impetus: Do ideas persist independently of their agents, or are they contingent artifacts shifting according to historical circumstance? Do they have a purpose, i.e. are they teleologically directed to an end? These and related questions led Vico to conceive the possibility of a "conceptual dictionary" and "conceptual language common to all nations," as well as an "ideal eternal history," in order to explain the rise and fall of nations according to the transition from one paradigmatic age to another, each age defined by a central concept: People first sense what is *necessary*, then consider what is *useful*, next attend to *comfort*, later delight in *pleasures*, soon grow dissolute in *luxury*, and finally *go mad* squandering their estates.⁵ Vico was therefore one of the first to postulate a history of humanity based not entirely on periods and cultures, but on conceptually defined ages as well.

Gustav Teichmüller's *Studien zur Geschichte der Begriffe* (1874) subsequently took a step toward a thematic history of concepts rather than of individuals or events. But it was not easy to decouple the history of concepts from original philosophy. Hegel, who is sometimes credited with introducing the term *Begriffsgeschichte*, thought of the history of philosophy as a philosophical endeavor in itself, and later Hegelian philosophers, such as Benedetto Croce, effectively identified philosophy with history: Philosophy and history "are not mutually conditioned, but identical."⁶ It was up to philosophers, rather than historians, to study

⁵ Vico 1999: paras. 161–162 and 241. ⁶ Croce 1917: 196.

concepts, especially in their “pure” form (focusing, for example, on their logical consistency).

Not everyone agreed, of course. Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897), the great historian of Renaissance culture and friend and esteemed colleague of Friedrich Nietzsche (both inspired by the late Schopenhauer), argued that *Anschauung* (intuition and contemplation) is more important than speculative reason for the purposes of accessing the collective experience of the past. Art, poetry, and myth inspired an appreciation of history and culture very different from the conceptual schemas employed by state education, by the Church, and, last but not least, by philosophers: “Leave me to experience and feel history on this lower level instead of understanding it from the standpoint of first principles,” Burckhardt wrote to a friend in 1842, in a tone typical of his aristocratic liberalism.⁷ He was not convinced that history was governed by the exposition or unfolding of philosophical concepts.

By the end of the twentieth century, the history of ideas and concepts was progressively and effectively uncoupled from the history of philosophy. Various new methodologies and technical field-labels were introduced in order to study how people thought: *history of concepts*, *conceptual history*, *history of ideas*, *intellectual history*. These terms are not synonymous, though in practice they may bleed into each other. The *history of concepts* places emphasis on cataloguing and interpreting the occurrences of terms in sources and contexts. One example in our field would be the use of Aristotelian terms in Komnenian texts. *Conceptual history* tries to interpret historical conflicts through the concepts employed by their protagonists. Iconoclasm is an example of a Byzantine conflict with both a political and a strong and overt conceptual aspect. Here ideas may be studied in their historical role as weapons, rather than from a more detached philological-lexicographical standpoint. In some cases, the historian might know that “reality changed long before the change was conceptualized,” while at other times “concepts might have been formed to set free new realities.”⁸

The founder of the *history of ideas*, the American philosopher Arthur Lovejoy (1873–1962), sought to write the “biography” of ideas, arguing that they were not only historical, but also transhistorical, in the sense that they surface again and again in the form of specific “unit ideas”: the equivalent of chemical or component elements in the natural sciences, unit ideas are the “primary and persistent or recurrent dynamic units of the history of thought.”⁹ For example, he talked about the idea of the “chain of being” as

⁷ Dru 1955: 74. Cf. Sigurdson 2004: 87–95. ⁸ Koselleck 2002: 36

⁹ Lovejoy 1936: 7. These elements are “implicit, or incompletely explicit *assumptions*, or more or less *unconscious mental habits*, operating in the thought of an individual or generation.” Lovejoy’s beautiful book sees Plato as providing the ideal case-study: the idea of the Chain of Being, namely the idea of the complete rational intelligibility of the world, which evolved into “an experiment in thought carried on

it moved from culture to culture. Other ideas that could be studied from this point of view include the belief in an exclusive revelation of religious truth, or the very ideas of salvation, God, and man. Contrariwise, Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School of *intellectual history* brought attention to particular contextual constraints, conceptual change, and rhetorical applications of philosophical vocabulary. Whereas *conceptual history* (as understood by Reinhart Koselleck) was “chiefly preoccupied with the slower march of time,” the focus now moved to “the pointillist study of sudden conceptual shifts.” Still, in both schools of thought concepts were seen “less as statements about the world than as tools and weapons of ideological debate.”¹⁰

This survey could be expanded by including perspectives that proved less popular, yet are potentially no less fascinating. For example, the philosopher and intellectual historian Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) suggested a history of metaphors (*Metapherngeschichte*).¹¹ Nicolai Hartmann explored the possibility of a *Problemgeschichte* or *history of arguments*, suggesting that problems, rather than ideas, span historical time even if they are reflected in variable concepts.¹² In a similar vein, Leo Strauss criticized the “historicist thesis” which argued that, whereas all answers to philosophical questions intend to be valid, modern scholars treat them as “historically conditioned” and defective. He argued that the questions themselves may be universal and intrinsic to the philosophic effort, enabling classical thought to speak meaningfully to modernity.¹³ Others moved in the direction of a *histoire des mentalités*, a history of mentalities or attitudes that account for collective social mindsets and outlooks rather than individual ideas.¹⁴ This form of intellectual history was most closely allied with social history. Each approach made its own methodological distinctions, which are rarely maintained rigidly in practice. Different perspectives may be complementary rather than antagonistic. For example, a “sociology of ideas” that traces networks and alliances or the study of “social objects,” for example divorce and legal agreements, may be related to philosophical or religious ideas that defined the existential orientation of epistemic and social agents.

Intellectual history today is most often defined as the branch of historiography that focuses on the evolution of concepts and ideas within specific historical contexts and explores their political and rhetorical sources, entanglements, and effects. It is premised on the assumption that abstract thought and arguments emerge and change within shifting and

for many centuries by many great and lesser minds”, from Plato to Schelling, albeit one failing in a grandiose manner: the hypothesis of the absolute rationality of the cosmos is untenable (329).

¹⁰ Skinner 2003: 180–181. ¹¹ Blumenberg 1960. ¹² Oexle 2001. ¹³ Strauss 1959: 70.

¹⁴ Chartier 1982: 47–86.

intertwined social, political, and philosophical circumstances. Intellectual historians try to establish why and how historical agents defended, refuted, elaborated, or recontextualized particular ideas in a given situation, and how those ideas then may have impacted the surrounding social context. It may, then, be seen as a field of inquiry concerned with: (1) the relation between an author's life and his texts; (2) the relation between society and texts, especially in regards to the origins of his ideas; (3) the relation between an author's intentions and the reception and interpretation of his texts; and (4) "conceptual shifts," that is, (a) how words change meaning within varying sociopolitical situations, and (b) how changes in the sociopolitical framework caused ideas to shift, fade away, or reemerge, influencing the way that historical agents thought of philosophy, theology, medicine, or law. For example, how and why did conceptions of Hellenism, authority, revelation, or Orthodoxy change?

Intellectual history maintains an equal distance, on the one hand, from pure history of ideas and concepts, which more or less isolates ideas from their sociopolitical framework and which is closer to some varieties of pure philosophy that offer a kind of timeless "view from nowhere"; and, on the other hand, from social and cultural history, which tend to treat philosophical discourse and intellectual pursuits as mere epiphenomena of cultural trends or social circumstances.

For example, many social historians of late antiquity and Byzantium tend to treat classical *paideia* monolithically as a badge of elite distinction, forming an interchangeable currency of political facilitation. It can instead be seen as a tense and dynamic complex encompassing ideas at odds with each other, and choices within it were meaningful and purposive. Instead of studies in which disputation appears as a social performance without regard for what exactly was being disputed and why, we can ask instead what, then, is the author or intellectual who introduces an idea, or elaborates on an idea, *doing* exactly? Intellectual historians often see texts as containing speech acts: words and terms are deeds, insofar as they not only are carriers of depersonalized meaning but reflect the intentions of historical agents and the intentionality of texts that function as agents in a historical setting. So this also entails a break from strict analytical philosophy, which often treats speech acts without reference to historical context: intellectual history aims to uncover the function of words and ideas in a given social context.

Any "history of intellectual history" will show that the field has been inclusive and pluralistic in its methodological priorities.¹⁵ Moreover, approaches that at one moment seemed to have long lost their appeal resurface in interesting and inspiring ways. For example, recent theoretical

¹⁵ Whatmore and Young 2015: 2.

work reappraises Lovejoy's belief that it is possible to transcend the restrictions of periodization and that it is legitimate to study ideas through time, across different cultural settings.¹⁶ The strict compartmentalization of conceptual shifts imposed by the once dominant paradigm of contextualism – the idea that cultural artifacts, including ideas, can be properly interpreted only within their narrow historical context – now appears questionable. The flexibility of contemporary methodological approaches is particularly relevant and an asset to an emerging field such as Byzantine intellectual history, where pagan antiquity and late antique Christianity continued for centuries to shape a changing conceptual *osmosis*, thus inviting a *longue durée* historical treatment of its conceptual components, both underlying and on the surface. Moreover, from a philosophical perspective, contextualism may simply not suffice to appreciate the actual contents of concepts and ideas, as opposed to their implications and application at the narrow sociopolitical moment of their promulgation.

Thus, intellectual history may be seen as potentially taking into account both the diachronic aspect of ideas (Where does this or that term come from? How has it traveled from there to here?) as well as their synchronic aspect (How does this or that concept relate to the Byzantine context, or to other ideas that have a different history?). This includes studying the immediate impact of ideas in their natural context, but also their consequences as effective agents in the long run, that is, to use Hans-Georg Gadamer's term, their *Wirkungsgeschichte* or "history of influence (or effect)." Of special interest, then, is the broader intellectual space (*Ideenraum*) defined by the dissemination of ideas, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the limitations and restrictions imposed upon it (for example) by political or clerical authority.¹⁷ From the viewpoint of intellectual history, issues of intellectual conformism or dissent, dissimulation, heresy, and ideological deviance may instigate fascinating research. For example, how far did the trials of philosophers in Byzantium influence the intention and ability of intellectuals to experiment with ancient Greek philosophical ideas in innovative ways? And how far did heresy from late antiquity to late Byzantium preserve and perpetuate philosophical queries that were considered obsolete in mainstream theological and clerical discourse?

An important premise of intellectual history is that novelty does not presuppose the truthfulness of its propositions. Novelty-claims are independent of truth-claims. This effectively and further divorces intellectual history from what is commonly seen as the principal endeavor of analytical philosophy: establishing the validity of arguments. The former contextually explores perspectival revisions and shifts, while the latter abstractly seeks to establish the conditions of meaningful propositions and

¹⁶ McMahon 2014; Knight 2012. ¹⁷ Siniossoglou 2010b.

judgments. For example, the Neoplatonic triads might or might not reflect the ontological order of the world in a truthful way, and Cappadocian theology may or may not be true. But the very question about their presumed truthfulness is not the essence of intellectual history. Interpretations do not need to be true to be intellectual or, indeed, interesting and culturally meaningful. In Quentin Skinner's view, critical engagement with the truthfulness of past claims and beliefs diverts us from a genuine appreciation of their historical significance. There can be no account of ideas isolated from their context, but only a history of their uses: "There is nothing, I ventured to suggest, lying beneath or behind such uses; their history is the only history of ideas to be written."¹⁸

We might call this the *topical* rather than *essential* significance of ideas. The point is that past claims and beliefs are interpretative moves performed within shifting nexuses and intellectual constellations, potentially generating new nexuses and constellations out of the old ones. For the vast majority of the historical agents that we seek to understand, then, the essence of the world is taken to be inseparable from their situated acts of interpreting the world. This is the point of convergence for Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*, Gadamer's *hermeneutics*, Derrida's *deconstruction*, and Skinner's *intellectual history*. Rather than reveal a preexisting and set timeless reality, interpretation perpetually reveals meaning that consists in the way concepts are used.

However, it must be emphasized that the approach to intellectual history outlined above might create a mentality in modern researchers that is fundamentally at odds with that of their historical subjects. The modern (implicit) advocacy of contingency, ontologically anchorless flux, and nominalism seems to safeguard the open-ended and inclusive character of political discourse. Intellectual historians prioritizing the topical or situated significance of ideas are therefore deeply mistrustful of essentialism and realism. But the Byzantines were not committed to such projects. We may treat ideas as contingent cultural artifacts that changed over time, but from Proklos to Gennadios Scholarios the Byzantines were sincerely invested in the transcendent truth of those ideas and involved in processes of self-definition based on them. Even if we allow that ideas are not "real" in the sense of possessing an essence of their own outside history, they may still be essential to the *worldview* of their bearers as well as to the outlook of scholars studying them. Consequently, a mere retrieval of the topical significance of ideas alone does not fully exhaust the scope of their existential significance. Byzantine intellectuals did not think that their ideas were valuable only or primarily because they had immediate rhetorical, political, and social repercussions. They thought that they were

¹⁸ Quoted in Palonen 2003: 4.

meaningful and valuable insofar as they were *true*. It was epistemology and metaphysics that determined these thinkers' modality of being and life experience. It is one thing to make use of a notion, for example for rhetorical or polemical purposes, but it is another to commit ourselves to its conceptual content. Beneath the mere *use* of ideas lies the capacity of ideas to evolve as way-of-being, a *tropos hyparxeos*. The historian who steps out of the nexus of philosophical priorities that defines the metaphysical projects of his subjects isolates himself from their thought-world in much the same (absurd) way that the philosopher isolates himself from their life-world when disregarding the need for a historically embedded understanding of agents and ideas. In both cases the danger is to assume a viewpoint-from-nowhere that alternately overstates the case for historicizing or abstracting ideas.

Put otherwise: the competition of perspectives is referable to a competition of worldviews. As Wilhelm Dilthey put it, worldviews are structures of life, that is, sets of beliefs that have their roots in experience and the psyche, in the intellect as well as in will and emotion. They are a mode of existence that, when shared, potentially ties individuals together into a community. Worldviews become criteria of evaluation by means of which historical agents judge whether a particular belief is sensible, and they include moral principles, symbols and systems of signs, and products of religious revelation. For example, Orthodoxy in Byzantium was felt to be a worldview and criterion, just as Platonism was for late antique pagans. Worldviews often relate to pre-theoretical, possibly subconscious reflection and commitments. Still, the principal claim of most worldviews is that they approximate truth about the Whole, which is why, according to Dilthey, both ideas and people "coalesce into groups among which there exists a certain affinity."¹⁹ Thus intellectual history becomes social and religious history, creating or at least fueling it. An important question here concerns the relation among worldviews. For example, were Hellenism and Christianity in Byzantium worldviews in permanent tension at all times, or parallel internal discourses that may be studied non-combatively, or perhaps varied according to circumstances? And are there idiosyncratic instances of confluence and hybridization owing to individuals moving beyond mainstream Church and state discourse, such as mystics and heretics?

THE CONTOURS OF BYZANTINE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

By ancient and medieval standards, Byzantine society was marked by a fair degree of literacy. Its various departments of state were bureaucratized and

¹⁹ Kluback and Weinbaum 1957: 29.

run by paperwork to a relatively high degree. Byzantium produced many authors, who collectively wrote thousands of works, and also many scribes who copied the latter along with the works of antiquity that they deemed worthy of preservation. In addition, the official religion was based on a set of sacred texts (the Scriptures), and an official theology that was produced by the Church Fathers (also authors) and ratified by Church Councils. The Church was just as bureaucratized as the state, and also required a certain degree of literacy from its officials. Throughout Byzantine history, debates raged on matters of politics and religion, and these often took the form of written exchanges. It is natural, then, for an intellectual history of Byzantium to focus on this world of authors, books, and codified doctrines for its subject-matter, and this volume will indeed do so. But before we commit to this approach, two important qualifications must be made.

First, we traditionally organize our studies according to texts that have survived, focusing on authors as the building-blocks of analysis, but intellectual history was by no means textually limited. Many debates took place orally (whether primarily or initially so), and the texts that we have record only one or two voices in them, sometimes after they were settled. Also, some of our texts aim to capture or reflect oral media such as speeches (that were later “published” in writing), debates (written up in the form of “dialogues”), and proceedings of meetings (such as Councils), whereas others were written with oral presentation in mind, including speeches, epistolography, curricular philosophy, and in some cases even historiography.²⁰ Thus, we should think in terms not of a polarity between “orality” and “textuality,” but rather of a spectrum of discourse in which some written genres emerged from an oral background to capture one side or only one moment in a primarily oral debate. For all its (rightly) vaunted literacy, Byzantium was still mostly an oral culture. Yet the groundwork has not been laid in the field that would enable an intellectual history such as this to have an oral component. It remains a desideratum.

The second caveat is an extension of the first. Just as texts do not capture the sum of Byzantine intellectual history, intellectual activity was not limited to the world of bishops and elite lay authors, specifically to those whose works managed to survive, whether by accident or design. Every human being has an intellectual biography, though that of most Byzantines lies beyond our reach, and there is no guarantee that the few whom we know were more interesting or more important than the millions that are lost to us. We still (wrongly) think of *paideia* in terms of texts, yet it was possible through the channels of oral culture alone, especially by attending church and memorizing the key texts that were recited there, for the average Byzantine to acquire a substantial religious education. And

²⁰ Croke 2010: 28–34; for the Roman empire, see Winsbury 2009.

the ability to think critically about the content of that education did not necessarily require a familiarity with, say, Aristotle, any more than it does now.²¹ Unfortunately, apart from tentative studies of village culture and popular politics in Constantinople,²² the groundwork has not yet been laid for a *People's Intellectual History of Byzantium*.

A further distinction is now necessary. Our authors generally did not come from the super-elite: few of them were emperors, leading senators, owners of vast estates, or generals, but many were the latter's secretaries, mid-level officials, courtiers, along with bishops, priests, deacons, and monks, a large number of whom had humble social origins. In other words, most of our texts come from the service class directly below the truly powerful. This class had many privileges compared to the majority of the population, but also vulnerabilities. The loss of patronage and salary could be devastating. Second, our texts were for the most part not generated on behalf of institutions.²³ To be sure, the Byzantine Church was probably the leading institution in terms of the production of texts and documents pertaining to intellectual history, as it had stakes in the maintenance of authority over certain spheres of thought. Few Byzantine monasteries had a sustained impact on the empire's intellectual life (as did, for example, that of Stoudios), though they played a great role in copying and transmitting texts. Still, it is not clear that new works written by individual monks within them enjoyed the sanction of the institution when (or if) they were disseminated. The state produced even less in this regard (we might take imperial panegyrics as a genre that reflected its priorities). In sum, for the most part our subject-matter was produced by individual authors writing probably on their own initiative, backed only by their personal name-recognition, office, or patron. Their fate in the market of ideas could not be known in advance. Some were forgotten or ignored in their own time, or unexpectedly condemned as heretics, while others managed to reformulate Orthodoxy and become saints.

These, in a nutshell, are the social contours of Byzantine intellectual history. What about its disciplinary contours? These are harder to discuss, because among the many subfields of Byzantine Studies, intellectual history is so far the least developed, in fact it hovers tenuously between existence and non-existence and is liable to be conflated with related and adjacent modes of inquiry. Few Byzantinists have ever openly admitted to intellectual history (possibly only one);²⁴ what we tend to have instead are books with theology, dogma, or philosophy in their titles.²⁵ The rest of this

²¹ Kaldellis 2014a. ²² Baun 2007; Kaldellis 2015b. ²³ See also Chapter 1.

²⁴ The honorable exception is Anastos 1979.

²⁵ E.g. Podskalsky 1977; Meyendorff 1979; Gahbauer 2010; Rigo 2011a and 2013b; Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012a.

section proposes a model for this promising field which attempts to define it against the background of other ways of arranging and studying the same material.

Our proposal generally follows the models of intellectual history that are practiced in many other fields, though it will likely encounter resistance, stemming from the particular and peculiar biases and ingrained assumptions of Byzantine Studies. We do not here claim to speak for the other contributors to this volume, nor can we present a “safe” consensus that will be relatively uncontroversial. There can be no consensus here, in part because the field of Byzantine intellectual history does not yet really exist, so in carving it out of existing scholarly practices we will necessarily engage in controversy. Conversely, we do not intend for our (provisional) model to be limited to this volume: there is scope for much more research to be done in the future. We hope that intellectual historians come out of the shadows cast by the current configurations and emphases of the field.

The study of Byzantium has traditionally focused on its political, military, diplomatic, social, economic, and ecclesiastical-religious history, for which texts – or rather brief excerpts of texts that are more often than not removed from their context – are used as “evidence.” Using texts as a means, in an instrumental way, has not been conducive to the emergence of intellectual history. For both heuristic and substantive reasons, intellectual life needs to be conceptually distinguished from the needs and preoccupations of other ways of looking at history: while sometimes they overlap, there are times and contexts when they diverge. For example, historians have abandoned the idea that political and economic history must march in step; we now know that political and imperial failures in the eleventh century were nevertheless accompanied by economic and demographic growth. So too we should distinguish intellectual history from, say, political history. For instance, the imperial decline of the Palaiologan empire was accompanied by remarkable experimentation and innovation in many areas of intellectual life, but this did not happen, by contrast, during the imperial collapse of the seventh century. Accordingly, a reign that was “great” in terms of military history need not have also patronized literature. Shifts in social history were not necessarily accompanied by new intellectual models (viewed perhaps as their epiphenomena).

The same disjunction should be applied to the level of the individual. Intellectual identity can be different from social or religious identity. Just because a person goes to church, or says the right words in contexts when they are required, does not mean that his thinking is orthodox in the way that contemporaries understood and valued orthodoxy. We cannot deny that a person was preoccupied with “pagan” thoughts on the grounds that he did not also go around performing pagan sacrifices: *social* conformity (or its opposite) is not the issue. The history of heresy in Byzantium makes it

clear that deviations from the norm did not necessarily imply one's parting from the ritual of the Church. In effect, no amount of evidence about a person's social life can predetermine the content of his or her intellectual identity, and it should, accordingly, not limit our options when it comes to its interpretation (to give a modern cautionary tale, consider the case of Mother Teresa, whose diaries present a spiritual profile riddled with doubt and insecurity in the faith, at odds with her public profile). Thus, different methods and assumptions are appropriate to establish the existential sites of our authors' lives that are studied by different subdisciplines, and these must include theology and the history of philosophy. The study of intellectual history should be taken at face value as distinct while remaining in open dialogue with all others.

As stressed in the previous section, intellectual history should not be seen or practiced in isolation from other types of history, with which it is mutually imbricated in more ways than can be described here. It does not occur in a vacuum, and so context is critically important. If we could summarize the middle ground that we aim to capture, it would be thus: "Ideas mattered, they were often reacting to cultural trends and social realities, and impacted upon them with what we might call an autonomous force; at the same time, however, they were always produced by specific authors reacting to their circumstances, whether immediate or general, and their existential valence and historical impact cannot be fully accounted for by general cultural, political, or social factors." Changes in the Byzantine sociopolitical framework caused ideas to shift, fade away, or reemerge, but the reverse could happen just as well. For example, Byzantine theological controversies, which obviously had a major impact on politics, society, and ideology, have never been successfully explained as expressions of other, underlying historical factors (e.g. social or ethnic struggles); instead, through mechanisms that have yet to be explained, differences in strongly held beliefs somehow created polarized social blocks. There is, of course, no way to sort out the reciprocal causal relationships between intellectual and non-intellectual factors and existential sites. In all fields, historians view events as driven by ideas (or ideologies) to a greater or lesser extent, and our contributors fall along different parts of this spectrum whenever they engage with this specific issue.

Despite its emphasis on cultural, economic, and social history, Byzantine Studies obviously does not entirely lack traditions of intellectual history. One substantial area of research, for obvious reasons, is theology. But for long the study of Byzantine theology either operated on a level of almost pure academic abstraction, or assumed a confessional vantage point that often claimed to be a natural continuation of the Byzantine tradition itself. Having said that, scholarly exponents of Orthodox theology are immensely useful guides who keep the field grounded in the key texts

and concepts, a service whose value increases when they are used as correctives to more flighty readings of the texts prompted by *au courant* literary theories (which tend, for instance, to dissolve the boundaries of “Christianity” or “Orthodoxy” and make them compatible with nearly anything – thus presupposing a viewpoint as unhistorical or ahistorical as any religious doctrine). On the other hand, the scope for a truly critical approach (beyond exposition) in exegetical scholarship is limited to subordinate aspects of the arguments. While confessional bias remains an issue – and one, moreover, that is rarely acknowledged – the study of theology has recently made tremendous advances, producing critical and historically embedded studies of religious-intellectual history, especially, in the case of Byzantium, of Orthodox–Catholic relations.²⁶

“Philosophy” in Byzantium (or, more problematically, “Byzantine philosophy”) is a controversial area for other reasons. For long this field was served by B. Tatakis’ brief and rather inadequate survey from 1949 (published in English translation in 2003, despite being hopelessly outdated). The study of philosophy in Byzantium has recently entered a new and vigorous phase, producing stimulating readings, especially of the Komnenian period and after. But, as Chapter 16 of this volume proposes, fundamental conceptual problems remain, or have been skirted. Most importantly, there is still no definition or consensus on what exactly might pass as philosophy in Byzantium: Was it *anything* that the Byzantines said it was, including the feats of physical self-denial practiced by ascetics? Can theology or scriptural revelation, which most of them took to be “true philosophy,” ipso facto count as philosophy for modern analysis? Such an inclusive approach would not pass muster in a department of philosophy, so by what standard are we to find philosophy in Byzantine texts? It sometimes seems as if this growing subfield is agreeing to pretend that the fundamental conceptual issues have been solved. What it tends to produce in the meantime are philologically oriented studies which take the form “Byzantine thinker X’s use of ancient thinker Y’s concept of Z,” focusing on commentaries and thereby skirting the question of what *philosophy* is – or should be – as an analytical category.²⁷ At any rate, whether or not the Byzantines produced much that properly counts as philosophy according to ancient and modern criteria, the Byzantine record manifests with clarity a profound preoccupation with the challenges posed by philosophy to a system of theological Orthodoxy that wanted to use philosophy for many of its own purposes but not grant it epistemic autonomy. It may be said that Byzantine thinkers were obsessed with the tension between “inner” and “outer”

²⁶ E.g. Hinterberger and Schabel 2011; Louth 2007a.

²⁷ See many of the papers in Ierodiakonou 2002c; Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012a; Arabatzis 2013a.

wisdom, as they experienced it. Thus, the history of the concept of “philosophy” at their hands, as a perennial tension embedded in this culture that was in different ways both Hellenic and Christian, is just as interesting as any original philosophy they may have produced. We look forward to vigorous debates on this, as philosophy itself deserves no less.

Theology and philosophy – however defined and approached – do not exhaust the remit of intellectual history, which this volume takes in an expansive sense to include engagement with classical literature, the theorization of rhetoric, various technical fields, and more. This brings us to what is likely the biggest challenge faced by our emerging field in its efforts to achieve self-definition: the recent growth in the study of Byzantine “literature,” an altogether salutary development but one which itself faces challenges of definition. On one level, this is the study of the literary aspects of all the texts out of which textual-intellectual history must necessarily be built. These two fields need not be competitors, of course, and in fact they must work together. Specifically, analysis of the ideas in any text must rest on a firm understanding of the goals and contextual constraints of the genre of writing in each instance; it must also factor in the “rhetorical moment” of its composition, the text’s specific circumstances and (often unacknowledged) specific targets.²⁸ Byzantine authors will often make abstract, depersonalized arguments which seem to be making a general “intellectual” case, even if in practice they are marshaling those arguments to gain an advantage in a specific debate, and might happily abandon them, or use their opposites, when caught up in a different fight. How did Byzantine authors find ways to innovate and break out of the rhetorical conventions within which they thought when they needed to? How far did they (or could they) expect their thought to be applied beyond the situational needs of the rhetorical moment?

The recent spur of literary-historical analysis has taught us a lot about this aspect of Byzantine writing, though it is a problem faced by intellectual historians of any period or society. But “literature” and intellectual history do not overlap as analytical categories to the degree that some philologists turned literary critics seem to think, or at least not always on the terms that they propose. It used to be the case, until past the mid-twentieth century in fact, that the editor of a Byzantine text would provide an introduction to the author that often counted in the field thereafter as the standard discussion of his ideas (one thinks, for example, of introductions provided by L.G. Westerink). The parallel history of literary and intellectual analysis reached its apex (and likely terminus) in the massive surveys of Byzantine secular and ecclesiastical writings by H. Hunger and H.-G. Beck,²⁹ which are still standard points of reference. Their division of texts into fields and

²⁸ Odorico 2012. ²⁹ Hunger 1978; Beck 1959.

genres formed the starting point for subsequent research and is still generally respected. In recent decades, however, the development of Byzantine literary studies has taken that branch of research in new directions which, while exciting, do not always serve the needs and interests of intellectual history. Specifically, it is not clear that Byzantine literature is always defined so as to include *what* authors and texts had to say, as opposed to *how* they said it, to *whom* they said it, and *why*. Thus, we now have sophisticated analyses of the rhetorical structures, modalities, and innovations of authors, texts, and genres; of their imagery; of their engagement with tradition; of concepts of authorship and constructions of social-authorial personae for the presentation and reception of their work; as well as of the networks of patronage and social occasions that framed their works and defined their intentionality – all well and good, but in the end some studies avoid discussing whether these authors expressed interesting ideas in their works that are worth discussing as such. Were there intellectual (rather than socio-rhetorical) purposes for which this whole apparatus of literary composition was set into motion? A recent study of Byzantine poetry, while stimulating in all those other fronts, answers No to this question, which is candid but strikes us as improbable and harkens disquietingly to older prejudices that the Byzantines had nothing really new or interesting to say.³⁰

A final challenge to which we must draw attention is the persistent tendency by the field to homogenize Byzantine society – politically, religiously, intellectually – and to subordinate individuals to normative ideas that allegedly exerted a stranglehold on the mind of the entire population. Study after study claims or assumes that “the Byzantines” could not conceive a particular radical, heterodox, or supposedly modern idea because they could not think outside the box of their imperial-Orthodox framework, a framework that is constructed by scholars through the selective use of quotations taken from texts valorized as normative. It is thereby commonly assumed that everyone was “normal” in terms of Orthodoxy or acceptance of the imperial system and social hierarchy, and that it was only minor personal or historical circumstances that differentiated one expression of these ideals from another. This can become a true analytical bias, closing off interpretative avenues on a priori grounds. It is not clear why a conformist drive has been applied so dogmatically to Byzantium in particular. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “Byzantium” was treated by many as an archetypical Orthodox and absolutist society, whether negatively by its Enlightenment

³⁰ Bernard 2014: 339; Papaioannou (2013) offers a brilliant analysis of Psellos’ careful fashioning of a sophisticated authorial identity in relation to tradition, but leaves it unclear what ideas Psellos sought to promote beyond aesthetics and authorship.

opponents or more positively by its modern Orthodox apologists: either way, its utility as a monolithic manifestation of an abstract type was too great to be troubled by the messiness of empirical case-by-case studies. It thus became possible to reify the Mind of Byzantium. More recently, and as an extension of the interpretative priorities of the rise of “late antiquity,” Orthodox Christianity is seen less as a historical religion and more as an all-encompassing “discourse,” a framework of modern analysis. This too produces a bias in favor of seeing everyone and everything as a variant of the basic discourse. Anyone who stands outside would (inconveniently) require a different framework of analysis.

We will make two methodological suggestions at this point, beyond the obvious empirical point that each case should be studied on its own merits and not forced to fit a preconceived model for a given society. The first is widely conceded by Byzantinists, whether or not they grasp implications for intellectual history. Byzantium was not an intellectually free society: there was an official religion, no other religions or systems of philosophical belief (with the partial exception of Judaism) were permitted, and penalties were imposed on those who were found or even only perceived to have deviated from Orthodoxy. “The concept of orthodoxy implies not only intolerance but also violence.”³¹ This violence took many forms – physical, legal, rhetorical, and social – and was backed by the authority of powerful institutions, namely the imperial state and Church. Their direct interest in the circulation of ideas has left a powerful negative imprint in the record, which is not often recognized: despite producing many heresies, Byzantium managed to ruthlessly suppress the transmission of heretical texts, contenting itself only with their refutation. Even pagan texts fared better – after they were properly “domesticated.” As for living authors, trouble was only a half-step away for any thinker (philosopher or theologian) who said the wrong thing – even if it was not always clear in advance what the right thing was in unresolved areas.³² Many charged ahead anyway in the unshakeable conviction that they were right, but others, like thinkers in repressed societies throughout history, developed methods of playing it safe, or indirectly or covertly expressing subversive ideas. Few things are as easy to fake as piety. This is well studied in other premodern fields, but has hardly been touched in Byzantium.³³ But knowing what we know about the context, we can no longer assume that any declaration of belief was sincere. Admittedly, this problem does not receive much attention in the chapters of this volume, but it forms an important area for

³¹ Cameron 2008: 114. For a striking and full declaration of the responsibility of Orthodox authorities to physically exterminate people who challenge the faith, see Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Oises*, in *Ceuvres complètes*, v. 4, 476–489; cf. *Against Plethon*, v. 4, 114, on the requirement to defend the faith.

³² See, for example, Chapter 27. ³³ Zagorin 1990; Melzer 2014; Baltussen and Davis 2015.

future research: philology and hermeneutics need to be more context-sensitive.

The second methodological point is this. The field as a whole is off-balance in stressing the normativity, conformity, and sameness of the culture, and needs to be more open to dissidence, marginal cases, and deviation. One approach that is fruitful when it comes to intellectual history is to assume that every idea or issue was the site of disagreement, and to seek to explore the relevant debate – rather than to look exclusively for the normative core or outcome and premise subsequent analysis on that. For every cultural artifact, we should ask: How did they disagree about this? How was it politically and intellectually contentious?

The normative standing even of “real” existing consensus is not always unproblematic. Those in power obviously have an interest in claiming that a state of affairs which benefits them rests on a stable, morally binding consensus, so one must take their testimony with a grain of salt . . . [Moreover], conflict exists not merely between groups but also within each individual as diverse forms of morality struggle for hegemony. No era and no individual has a completely clearly articulated, single consistent world-view.³⁴

No society has ever been as monolithic in its ideological make-up as the Byzantium that one often encounters in the pages of scholarship. The totalizing fallacy of ideology-as-worldview must be exposed.³⁵ From this perspective, for example, Orthodoxy emerges as less a uniform blanket that covered the culture and more as a site of contestation: its very identity was constantly being challenged, defined, and redefined through dissent and disagreement. Orthodoxy was a matrix of heresy, and its relationship to Greek philosophy was especially fraught with tension from the beginning. While we did not put this before our contributors as a guideline, we find in the end that many of their chapters document this aspect of Byzantium, namely its vibrant and troubled intellectual life. Normative standards frequently became insecure, and individual thinkers broke from established beliefs (see, for example, Metochites and imperial ideology in Chapter 36). Others were thought to have done so in their own time but were later rehabilitated to Orthodoxy according to retrospective criteria (see, for example, the case of Maximos the Confessor in Chapter 24). Intellectual history is premised on the notion that historical agents could think for themselves in ways that problematize their subjection to those categories of cultural and social history that dominate the study of late antiquity and Byzantium today.

³⁴ Geuss 2001: 5. ³⁵ C. Bell 2009: 188.

Byzantine intellectual history must, therefore, historicize confessional theology; adopt rigorous standards and definitions against a too-permissive notion of philosophy; insist on ideas, concepts, and debates against the formalist tendency of literary study to limit its analysis with genres, authorial modalities, and the constraints of the rhetorical moment; and look beyond the ideological formal orders and limitation that the field has sought to impose on all Byzantine thinkers *a priori*. We hope that the cumulative effect of this volume will be to give this emerging subfield its own voice and focus.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS VOLUME

The overall shape of this volume and the major decisions that we made at its inception should be clear from the table of contents. In terms of approach, we commissioned authoritative discussions of the “state of the field” in each topic, drawing on a mix of established scholars and newer voices. Contributors were given room to make original arguments if warranted, while still covering the important authors, ideas, and themes. Our imagined readership consisted not primarily of experts in each topic but of students and scholars from adjacent fields (for example, Classical, Medieval, Islamic, Renaissance, and Early Modern Studies) who want to know more about this important aspect of Byzantium. The volume should, however, be just as useful to Byzantinists. First, even experts in the various areas will find that the chapters make original arguments that can emerge only from synthetic overviews that eschew hyper-specialization on one text or author. Second, no one knows equally all the fields covered here, certainly not in their dynamic combination and juxtaposition, and many of them have not received a synthetic survey in many decades – or ever. In this way, we aimed to consolidate the current state of Byzantine intellectual history and provide a platform for the growth that is sure to come.

Though both editors have track records of ec-centric, revisionist scholarship, we opted in this case for a more conservative approach, especially in the selection of topics. The Byzantines thought and wrote about a great many things, and there are perhaps no absolute standards by which some topics can be included and others excluded. The criteria that we used to select topics for coverage included (a) the bulk of the surviving material relating to a topic, as well as the resilience of ideas related to it, which loosely correlates to the intensity and popularity of Byzantine interest in it; (b) the particularity and discrete identity of any one topic relative to others, especially as expressed in the existence of distinct genres devoted to their exploration; for example, contributions bearing a field-specific title (e.g. relating to astronomy or rhetoric) indicate that the Byzantines themselves

considered this as an identifiable area of thought; and (c) the existence of a relatively specialized vocabulary and set of ideas for discussing that topic in explicitly theorized terms. These criteria in combination led to the exclusion of equally fascinating topics such as Byzantine thinking about gender, holiness, skepticism, the future, or economics.³⁶ We do not rule out the possibility of editing a separate volume on such topics. The criteria listed above, which are intrinsic to the Byzantine evidence, were reinforced by an external one as well: we wanted to present a volume that would interface easily with traditional topics of study in intellectual history generally, so that scholars from other fields can use our findings and data in their own work.

Another choice that we faced was chronological. An empire whose history spanned 1,100 years and which had provinces in three continents, where texts were produced in at least half a dozen languages, presents an unwieldy mass of materials. For a number of reasons, we decided to focus on the period after the seventh century. The early Byzantine period, known also as the late Roman period or late antiquity, has been amply covered in recent studies and surveys (for example, the *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*), whereas Byzantium after the seventh century has received less attention and never systematically in one place. The sheer bulk of the earlier material, and the space that would have to be devoted to such foundational authors as the Church Fathers and the Neoplatonists, would leave less room for those middle and later periods that are understudied and deserve a seat at the table. Intrinsic reasons reinforce this periodization. First, the imperial crisis of the seventh century led to a sudden decline in the practice of many areas of intellectual life, which were subsequently reconstituted on different terms, as the chapters that follow explain. In most fields, the transition from late antiquity to the middle Byzantine period involved a gap in production that lasted from the mid-seventh to the ninth century, or beyond. This gap justifies the period-break we adopt. While we do not wish to deny the axes of continuity which bridged that gap in various sites, Byzantine intellectual life was not a smooth continuation of one or another late antique worldview. We therefore asked our contributors to focus on the period after c. 650 CE, but in many cases they felt it necessary to get a long running start in the earlier period.

Second, the gap mentioned above coincided with a loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, especially of the provinces in which Latin, Coptic, and

³⁶ Our criteria would include the exegesis of biblical and patristic texts but for reasons of space we omitted this tradition, which will be covered extensively in handbooks of Byzantine literature (in preparation). This tradition is heavily weighted in favor of early Byzantium (late antiquity), which we eschew in this volume (see below for periodization).

Syriac were spoken, with the concomitant loss of the increasingly separatist ecclesiastical and theological traditions that some of them were harboring. In the early Byzantine period, intellectual life in Greek was, in many regions and the capital, influenced by and in dialogue with developments that were taking place in other languages, but this was much less the case after the seventh century. Only a small number of Byzantine thinkers subsequently read learned languages other than Greek. Therefore, while we are strongly in favor of inter-linguistic and cross-cultural study, we see intellectual life in Byzantium after the end of antiquity as essentially a Greek phenomenon. Parallel handbooks (in preparation) on Byzantine literary history have made the same choice. Third, to a far greater degree than in late antiquity, Byzantine intellectual life took place within an Orthodox Christian frame of reference. This is not to deny that individual thinkers took their engagement with pagan thought “too far,” as exponents of official doctrine and political authorities saw it. But in the middle and later periods this phenomenon assumed different forms of expression: it was not supported by a thriving non-Christian intellectual scene. By 550 CE, the Church and its allies in the administration had driven it out of existence. We did not, however, want to commit to a full and representative coverage of the end of pagan thought (which, we believe, has been presented in far too irenic colors recently). Still, individual contributions make clear the extent to which late antique Hellenizing thought lived on in the works of later thinkers, whether as a resource under “containment” or as a potentially revived threat.

As many of the chapters in this volume make clear, the Byzantines often divided their intellectual patrimony into its pagan and Christian components, each of which had canonical authors for various genres and fields. It is a commonplace to say that being educated in Byzantium meant that one had studied those canonical texts. But this had implications that are worth stating. Being educated did not, as it does today, mean that one was necessarily up-to-date on recent work. Indeed, it poses the question of whether Byzantine intellectual history was linear and accumulative, with each period building on the advances of its immediate predecessor. In many fields, it seems rather that each thinker was looking back to the culture’s ancient and patristic sources, jumping over much that came in between – or pretending to do so. This phenomenon tends to defeat the effort to write a linear, progressive, and integrated history. A thematic approach works better, which allows our contributors to assess the extent to which each field built upon recent advances or looked to the past.

In the end, periodization is largely a convenience for organizing material according to educational or academic typologies, “for the sake of instruction” as a Platonist commentator might put it. In substantive intellectual terms, period-limits are repeatedly defeated by the long shelf life of books

and the ability of ideas to reproduce themselves immaterially and perpetually, which makes them so radically different from individual persons, social classes, economic structures, and political institutions. The case of Byzantium is eminently illustrative of this. Its political life was long enough as it was, but some of the basic templates of its intellectual life were even older, constituted by a selective appropriation of classical Greek thought that was subsequently overlaid, or reconstructed, by the Church Fathers. These legacies or patrimonies, the classical and the patristic, provided the basic modes and orders within which most Byzantine intellectual life took place. Proklos and pseudo-Dionysios loom large in debates that took place many hundreds of years after their time. Julian the Apostate and “the pagan scare” continued to influence the way that theologians patrolled the borders of truth a thousand years after the last pagan emperor died, as his avatar was firmly lodged in their view of the world: the Byzantines never “got over” Julian, who for them stood for the possibility that the pagan thought-world might rise up and live again. Thus, the concept and viability of a pagan worldview was constantly present in Byzantine thought. To repeatedly deny an idea often amounts to preserving and perpetuating it. Thus, we encouraged our authors of chapters to reflect on classical or late antique material, to whatever degree deemed necessary to explain later developments. The volume thus has a flexible approach to periodization, while keeping its focus on the middle and later periods.

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PART I

THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

CHAPTER 1

INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS: THE COURT,
SCHOOLS, CHURCH, AND MONASTERIES

JONATHAN HARRIS

Intellectual debate and the transmission of knowledge did not take place in sequestered academic institutions in Byzantium. Scholars were usually politicians, clergymen, or monks and often they were active participants in the major events of their day. Their intellectual activities were therefore usually undertaken in the context of the imperial court or the Church and often, although not always, reflected contemporary concerns.

As regards the court, Byzantium was distinguished from western Europe during the earlier Middle Ages by maintaining a secular administrative elite. In the west, where education had become the preserve of the Church and the royal household provided a rudimentary center of administration, officials tended to be clergymen before the late twelfth century. It was very different in the Great Palace in Constantinople, a complex of buildings next to the Hippodrome and facing the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in the heart of the city, and in the palace of Blachernai, close to the Land Walls. Here the corridors were thronged by secular officials and secretaries, some of them eunuchs. A considerable proportion of them bore purely honorary titles but there was a large body of officials whose tasks were to advise the emperor, draft his correspondence, create consensus around his policies, and fulfill whatever other functions that their ruler chose to entrust to them. Foremost among them was the *parakoimomenos* (chamberlain), the closest thing to a chief minister. The *logothetai* oversaw various departments such as the treasury while other functionaries with titles such as *kouropalates*, *protospatharios*, and *protovestiaris* had less closely defined duties.¹

These office holders influenced the development of imperial policy but some of them were also philosophers and historians in their leisure moments. That dual role of politician and scholar stemmed from the nature of Byzantine higher education. Since the year 360, holders of the highest posts in the imperial secretariat had been required by law to have completed a course of higher education, and promotions were promised to those who attained distinction in the liberal arts.² There was what might be

¹ Tougher 2008: 54–60; Harris 2017: 59–65.

² *Theodosian Code* 14.1.1 (tr. 405); Wilson 1996: 2, 49–50.

termed a university in Constantinople from at least 425 (when it was reformed with thirty-one chairs) although it is perhaps misleading to use that word to describe it. It was by no means an independent academy dedicated to the pursuit of learning for its own sake. Its main aim was the production of able administrators. It also lacked a corporate identity or name, as it consisted of ad hoc appointments of teachers supported by the emperors.³

Inevitably there were times when the university flourished and others when it was probably in abeyance. It is impossible to document its continuous existence after c. 600: what we have instead are periodic “refoundations.” There is no evidence for its existence during the eighth century but it was revived during the reign of Michael III (842–867). The emperor’s uncle, the *kaisar* Bardas, who largely ran the empire, reestablished the university in the palace of the Magnaura, part of the Great Palace complex. There were to be teachers of philosophy, grammar (i.e. literature), astronomy, and geometry and they were to be paid from the treasury rather than be reliant on fees (or bribes) from students. The philosophy teacher was Leo the Mathematician, the most prominent Byzantine scholar of the time.⁴ In 1045, the university was again revived and reformed: faculties of Philosophy and Law were created, with Constantine (later Michael) Psellos taking charge of Philosophy with the title “Consul of the Philosophers,” and John Xiphilinos of Law as *nomophylax* (“Guardian of the Laws”).⁵ These two men were also close imperial advisors and played a direct role in making and implementing policy.

The capture and sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 brought about another hiatus, although there is evidence that traditional higher education did continue on a smaller scale at the court in exile at Nicaea.⁶ After the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–1282) refounded the university once more and entrusted its governance to George Akropolites, one of his high ministers. Higher education remained available in Constantinople until the city fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, although toward the end it was probably not funded from the treasury but by private fees. In these last years of the empire, teaching often took place in *xenones*, institutions that functioned primarily as hospitals.⁷ In the early empire, major cities had funded municipal chairs of rhetoric, grammar, and sometimes philosophy, but there is no evidence for this institution after the reign of Justinian. In all periods there was private instruction, which may have been responsible for

³ *Theodosian Code* 14.9.3 (tr. 414–415) = *Justinianic Code* 11.19.1; see Lemerle 1971: 63–64.

⁴ Genesios, *On the Reigns of the Emperors* 4.17; Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 101; Lemerle 1971: 158–160; Wilson 1996: 79–84.

⁵ Hussey 1937: 51–72; Wolska-Conus 1976b. ⁶ Constantinides 1982: 5–27.

⁷ Constantinides 1982: 31–49; Miller 1997: 159–161.

most of the teaching taking place at any time. These teachers survived by charging fees from their students and securing the support of patrons, including members of the imperial family, for whom they often composed literary or scholarly works. Two such teachers were Theodore Prodromos and John Tzetzes, in the early to mid-twelfth century. In their letters they developed the persona of the “struggling scholar”; both lodged in monasteries for parts of their careers and sought the patronage of the court.

By the mid-fourteenth century, Constantinople had lost its monopoly on higher education. That was largely the result of the decentralization of power. As Byzantine territory shrank and parts of the empire were cut off from Constantinople by land, regional centers tended to be ruled almost autonomously by a junior member of the imperial family. Between 1349 and 1380, the Byzantine holdings in the Peloponnese were administered by Manuel Kantakouzenos who resided in the town of Mistra and bore the title of despot. Thessalonike too had a series of autonomous rulers, starting with empress Anna, the mother of John V Palaiologos (1341–1391). The courts of these provincial despots employed educated administrators and so generated the higher schooling that produced them. The classical scholar Demetrios Triklinios ran a school in Thessalonike and the Platonist philosopher George Gemistos Plethon drew students to study under him at Mistra.⁸

The higher education curriculum, which began around the age of fourteen, was traditional and highly formalized. Students were taught the *trivium* of poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy, and the *quadrivium* of geometry, mathematics, astronomy, and music, a division that can be traced back to at least 100 BCE. These divisions were rather loose, and in practice higher education in Byzantium involved the study of the literature and philosophy of ancient Greece and especially that of classical Athens. Authors who were studied for the *trivium* included the poets Homer and Hesiod, the orators Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Lysias, the philosophers Plato and Aristotle, and the satirist Lucian. For the *quadrivium*, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Nikomachos were the main authors. Law and medicine were also studied, the latter largely through the writings of Galen and Dioskourides.⁹ It might seem incongruous that the Christian Byzantines should base their education on works written by pagans. Part of the reason for their retention was undoubtedly the scientific insights provided by the authors of the *quadrivium*, but as far as Byzantine intellectuals were concerned those of the *trivium* were far more important because they embodied what were regarded as the most perfect examples of Greek poetry and prose. Hence Byzantine university students were not expected merely to read these texts but to learn to write in the same way. Their most

⁸ Nicol 1982: 121–131; Masai 1956: 48–65. ⁹ Buckler 1929: 178–187; Wilson 1996: 18–27.

common exercise was to write rhetorical exercises in the style of the ancient orators. In doing so, they had to set aside the everyday Greek that they had learned at their mothers' knees and cultivate instead a literary language that had ceased to be spoken many centuries before.

Intellectual life at the Byzantine court was molded by the common educational background of those who held office there, since they were all steeped in the ancient literature that they had pored over and imitated as students. To take one example, prominent courtiers were expected to give speeches on important occasions such as the anniversary of the emperor's accession or at his funeral. Their main theme was a eulogy of their subject but they were hardly for widespread dissemination since they were delivered in ancient rather than contemporary Greek and hence incomprehensible to the mass of the population. The content likewise reflected the classical education of the speaker. In a speech given in 1193, George Tornikes assured emperor Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195) that he was the very philosopher king for whom Plato had searched in vain. In his eulogy at the funeral of John III Batatzes (1221–1254), George Akropolites compared Homer's Agamemnon unfavorably to the late emperor. These speeches were no mere antiquarian exercise, however. Behind the façade of archaic language, they could be used to make political points. They were often a form of propaganda, presenting the emperor's policies and successes in the best possible light to influential elite.¹⁰ They could also be used as an acceptable way to voice opposition or to advise a change of policy. In 1190, Niketas Choniates used a speech ostensibly in praise of Isaac II to mount a subtle critique of that emperor's policy towards the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152–1190). It was in speeches and policy memos delivered to Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) and the emperor's brother Theodore, despot at Mistra, that Plethon outlined his views on the reform of the Peloponnese, a program strongly influenced by Plato's *Republic*.¹¹

The strong link between classical education and politics did not preclude the pursuit of purely scholarly activity at court, especially when the emperor was himself interested. During the reigns of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945–959), Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328), and Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) in particular, literary circles formed at the Byzantine court. Under Constantine IX, Psellos found time to pursue his interests in philosophy and teach while still advising the emperor and drafting his correspondence. His associates Constantine Leichoudes, John Xiphilinos,

¹⁰ Angelov 2007: 29–77.

¹¹ Partial translations in Barker 1957: 160, 198–212; Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 250; Woodhouse 1986: 79–118; Angelov 2006: 49–68.

and John Mauropous had similar interests.¹² At the court of Andronikos II, the most notable intellectual was Theodore Metochites, the emperor's chief minister who was also a philosopher, essayist, and patron of learning and the arts. Maximos Planoudes, who led an embassy to Venice in 1296, studied classical texts on poetry, astronomy, and mathematics in his spare time. Unusually for a Byzantine scholar, Planoudes also had a good command of Latin, perhaps perfected during his stay in Venice, which enabled him to produce a translation of St. Augustine's *De trinitate* and other works. At the end of the reign, Nikephoros Gregoras, a polymath who wrote on everything from eclipses to musicology, emerged as one of the most prominent intellectuals of the next generation.¹³ The members of these literary circles maintained their cohesion by exchanging letters, the main object being to write in a suitably classical and ornate style rather than to convey news or information.¹⁴ The intellectual activity of the Byzantine court sometimes extended into areas which fell outside the parameters of classical literature and Christian theology, although it did depend on who was emperor at the time. Psellos investigated "forbidden" areas of knowledge such as the Chaldaean Oracles during the later eleventh century, and had to defend himself against accusations of irreligion.¹⁵ Under Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), on the other hand, such activity was firmly discouraged and Psellos' student Italos was tried for philosophical heresies. Under Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), astrology was greatly in vogue, although earlier emperors had also consulted soothsayers.¹⁶ In general, though, the nature of Byzantine education ensured that debate had its basis in the writings of the ancient Greeks, in Scripture, or in the Greek Fathers of the Church.¹⁷

The court did not have a monopoly on learning and knowledge. Private individuals maintained their own libraries, although they would have been small: fewer than thirty volumes to judge by surviving inventories.¹⁸ Similarly, not all those educated in the university spent the rest of their careers in the imperial administration, for many were to be found in the ranks of the clergy. The obvious example is Photios, patriarch of Constantinople (858–867, 878–886), who may have studied under Leo the Mathematician, although there is no specific evidence that he did so, and who went directly from the ranks of the imperial secretariat to being patriarch. Other highly educated men were appointed to provincial sees, such as Arethas, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, who commissioned and annotated manuscripts of Plato and Euclid. Similar scholar-bishops were John Mauropous, Psellos' teacher, who became bishop of Euchaita,

¹² Kaldellis 2006: 4–5. ¹³ Wilson 1996: 229–241, 256–269. ¹⁴ Mullett 1981: 75–93.

¹⁵ Kaldellis 2006: 102–104. ¹⁶ Magdalino 2003b: 15–31. ¹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 5.8.

¹⁸ Wilson 1975: 7.

and Michael Choniates, the brother of Niketas Choniates, appointed archbishop of Athens in the late twelfth century. Both Mauropous and Choniates wrote numerous letters to their friends back in Constantinople in impeccable ancient Greek, lamenting the hardships of their provincial life.¹⁹ In the twelfth century in particular, many learned graduates of the schools of Constantinople were placed as bishops in the provinces.

The Church, moreover, provided an alternative to the university in the form of the patriarchal school or academy which probably existed in Constantinople from the fifth century. Like the university, it was periodically revived and its history cannot be traced continuously. The historian Theophylaktos Simokattes may be referring to such a revival when he credits patriarch Sergios I (610–638) with restoring philosophy to the capital.²⁰ Another reorganization took place under patriarch Photios during the 860s, not long after the *kaisar* Bardas' revival of the palace university. Teaching took place in or around various churches throughout Constantinople, including Hagia Sophia and the Holy Apostles, but the curriculum was by no means strictly theological. Classical authors were read for their style in the same way as in the secular schools, although perhaps more as an introduction to the study of the Church Fathers. Ancient medical and mathematical texts were also taught.²¹ The patriarchal school seems to have been at its most influential during the twelfth century, after the reforms of Alexios I.²² Its more prominent role might have been a reaction to the tendency of some intellectuals of the previous two generations, such as Psellos and Italos, to mix too much of Plato and the Neoplatonists into their exposition of Christianity. The school was inactive during the period of Latin rule from 1204 to 1261 but reopened in 1265 under the direction of Manuel Holobolos. Among those who taught there was George Pachymeres, a deacon and author of a history covering the years 1255 to about 1308. This revived school was not as successful as it had been in the past, much of the energy of the teachers being directed toward the theological disputes over the Arsenite schism and the Union of Lyons of 1274.²³

Monasteries were another center of intellectual activity, although on one level this arose not from their original function but from a role that they came to play in political life. Those who had lost in the endless round of power struggles at the court often ended up in monastic institutions which acted both as sanctuaries and as prisons. When emperor Leontios was overthrown by Tiberios III Apsimar in 698, he suffered the indignity of

¹⁹ E.g. Mauropous, *Letters*; Michael Choniates, *Letters*.

²⁰ Theophylaktos Simokattes, *History* pr.: *Dialogue* 3–8.

²¹ Mesarites, *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles* 894–896; Dvornik 1950: 120–124; Browning 1962–1963: 170–180.

²² Magdalino 1993a: 327–328; Katsaros 1988: 163–209. ²³ Constantinides 1982: 50–65.

having his nose cut off before being immured in the Dalmatou monastery.²⁴ Some spent these last years of political exile and seclusion in writing and research. The emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–1354) retired to the monastery of Charsianites in Constantinople after he had abdicated in the face of a coup-d'état by his son-in-law, John V. He took monastic vows under the name Ioasaph and lived on for nearly thirty years. During this period he wrote a history of his times in which he sought to exonerate himself from the charge that his usurpation of the throne had brought ruin on the empire. He also penned a number of theological tracts in defense of Gregory Palamas and Hesychasm.²⁵ Theodora Raoulaina (d. 1300), the niece of Michael VIII Palaiologos, fell out with her uncle over the issue of the Union of Lyons and became a nun after the death of her husband in 1274. In her convent of St. Andrew in Krisei in Constantinople, she not only wrote hagiography but copied out manuscripts of classical texts, such as the orations of Aelius Aristides. She kept up an active correspondence with other intellectuals such as Maximos Planoudes.²⁶ The most active scholar among these political has-beens was Anna Komnene, daughter of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos. After her father's death she had plotted to remove her brother, John II Komnenos (1118–1143), from the succession and replace him with her husband, Nikephoros Bryennios. The bid for the throne was unsuccessful, and although John II treated his sister with great leniency her political career was over. Anna spent much of the rest of her life in the convent of the Virgin Full of Grace (Kecharitomene) which had been founded by her mother, the empress Eirene, although she did not become a nun until the very last days of her life. It was probably there that Anna wrote her biography of her father, the famous *Alexiad* which, like Kantakouzenos' history, was a defense of her own political stance. Not all of her literary activity had a political aim. It is not clear exactly how sequestered she was in the Kecharitomene after 1118, but Komnene still managed to be the center of a circle of scholars who were studying the works of Aristotle, including George Tornikes, metropolitan of Ephesos, Eustratios, metropolitan of Nicaea, and a certain Michael of Ephesos. Under her patronage several commentaries were produced, notably on the *Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Politics*.²⁷

The role of monasteries as intellectual centers was not dependent solely on their sometimes reluctant guests. Like monasteries in the west, they were active in book production. In the days when the only way to reproduce a book was to copy it out laboriously by hand, monastic scribes were responsible for a large proportion of the Greek manuscripts made

²⁴ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 371. ²⁵ Nicol 1996: 134–160. ²⁶ Nicol 1994: 33–47.

²⁷ Browning 1962: 1–12.

during the Byzantine period. These were mainly the Bible, the Church Fathers, and theological texts, but monks copied classical works too. During the tenth century, a monk called Ephraim produced copies of the Acts of the Apostles, Aristotle's *Organon*, and Polybios' *Histories*. Monasteries also provided a safe setting where books and knowledge could be stored. In the early fourteenth century, the scholar and courtier Theodore Metochites housed his library in the monastery of St. Savior in Chora and it remained one of the best libraries in Constantinople even after his fall from power and his death in 1332. Nikephoros Choumnos (d. 1327) bequeathed his library to the convent of Christ Philanthropos where his daughter was abbess.²⁸

As well as reproducing and storing texts, monasteries were centers of thought and writing in the spheres of theology, ecclesiastical order, and mysticism. For much of the Byzantine period, the most active monastic intellectual center in Constantinople was St. John Stoudios. Founded in the fifth century, it was refounded in 799 when the empress Eirene (797–802) asked the monks of Sakkoudion in Bithynia to migrate to the capital and repopulate the largely abandoned monastery. Under its new abbot, Theodore the Stoudite (759–826), it became a center for monastic reform. After Theodore's death, the *Hypotyposis*, based on his teachings, was compiled by his followers and became the basis for the foundation charters of a large number of monasteries, especially in southern Italy, the Balkans, and Russia.²⁹

Monasteries often acted as hotbeds of opposition to imperial policies. In 767, the emperor Constantine V (741–775) converted the Dalmatou monastery into a barracks, doubtless as a punishment for opposition to his Iconoclast policy.³⁰ Platon, abbot of Sakkoudion, broke off communion with the patriarch of Constantinople, Tarasios, in protest at the latter's tacit approval of the second marriage of Constantine VI (780–797). The emperor subsequently arrested the entire community and sent them into exile. The monks of Stoudios in particular gained a reputation for fearless opposition. They were prominent in standing up to the second wave of Iconoclasm from 815 to 843 and in defending the orthodoxy of icon veneration. Theodore the Stoudite wrote three refutations of the Iconoclasts, building on the arguments of St. John of Damascus.³¹ After the defeat of Iconoclasm in 843, the monks of Stoudios remained as outspoken as ever. They denounced the leniency of patriarch Methodios I (843–847) toward dismissed Iconoclast bishops and were consequently

²⁸ Wilson 1996: 138, 256; Ševčenko 1975; Hatlie 2007: 412–419, 419–424; Nicol 1994: 66.

²⁹ Morris 1995: 17–18, 45–46; Hatlie 2007: 323–324, 337–351.

³⁰ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 443, 470–471; Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 650–654.

³¹ Roth 1981: 8–16.

excommunicated. When papal legates visited Constantinople in 1054, a monk of Stoudios called Niketas Stethatos wrote a pamphlet denouncing the beliefs and practices of the western Church. The emperor Constantine IX, hoping to make an alliance with the pope against the Normans, was furious. He ordered Stethatos to revoke his views publicly and had the offending pamphlet burnt.³²

While Stoudios remained influential over several generations, other Constantinopolitan monasteries enjoyed briefer periods as intellectual centers. St. Mamas flourished under its abbot, St. Symeon the New Theologian, between 980 and 1022. It was there that Symeon wrote his huge collection of homilies and other spiritual writings. The Orphanotropheion, a monastery with a complex of buildings dedicated to the care of the elderly, sick, and disabled, was refounded by Alexios I Komnenos in the 1090s. It also had an educational purpose, for both basic literacy and classical texts were taught there.³³

After 1204, provincial monasteries became more prominent as intellectual centers, following the general decentralization of intellectual life that took place. The monastery of Sosandra, close to Magnesia ad Sipylum in Asia Minor, was founded by John III Batatzes to celebrate his victories over the Turks and to provide a burial place for himself and his family. After Batatzes' death, it played an important role in the development of his cult as a saint.³⁴ In Thessalonike, the Nea Moni, which was founded in the late fourteenth century, produced two literary figures, Makarios Choumnos (fl. c. 1360–1382) and Gabriel, metropolitan of Thessalonike (d. 1416/17).³⁵ The most prominent monastic intellectual center outside Constantinople was Mount Athos. The Holy Mountain forms the easternmost of the three rocky promontories of Chalkidiki and was entirely given over to monks and hermits. The hermits had been there for centuries but in 963 the first monastery, the Great Lavra, was established on the mountain by St. Athanasios the Athonite. By about 1400 there were some fifty monastic houses of all sizes on Athos. The thought and writings that came from the Holy Mountain were very different from those of St. John Stoudios. Athos was far from Constantinople, so while the monks may well have disagreed with imperial policies such as the Union of Lyons, their opposition was much less obvious. Athos was, moreover, not a single monastery but a collection of them, along with a large community of hermits who spent most of their time in solitude. Many of the monasteries were really lavras where the monks lived alone but came together on Sundays to worship. Thus there was little interest in developing monastic rules or forming

³² Humbert of Silva-Candida, *Brevis et succincta commemoratio*, col. 1001.

³³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 15.7; Morris 1995: 95, 282. ³⁴ Mitsiou 2011: 665–666.

³⁵ Russell 2009: 32–33.

unified political pressure-groups (the other type of monastery in Byzantium was the “coenobitic,” where the monks actually lived together).

It was in the area of prayer and spirituality that Athos became so influential. Mystics such as Nikephoros the Monk (d. c. 1300) and Gregory of Sinai (d. 1346), who both lived solitary lives of meditation and asceticism, wrote treatises on the spiritual life. They laid emphasis on the superiority of divine revelation over human reason and the possibility of direct experience of God through continuous prayer. When, during the 1330s, the teachings of these so called Hesychasts came under attack from intellectuals in Constantinople, Athos became the center for its defense, with the monk Gregory Palamas being the most strident voice.³⁶

In the last years before the fall of Constantinople, it was the monastery of Christ Pantokrator that played a central role in the most urgent debate of the day: whether union with the Catholic Church was a price worth paying for western help against the Ottoman Turks. The Pantokrator had been founded in 1136 by the emperor John II Komnenos and had a hospital attached to give free treatment to all who needed it.³⁷ Its church served as the place of burial for emperors of the Komnenos and Palaiologos dynasties. In 1450, the courtier and intellectual George Scholarios took monastic vows under the name Gennadios and joined the community at the Pantokrator from where he led the opposition to the Union of Florence of 1439. His tracts against Union were nailed to the door of his cell where crowds of people came to read them. The debate came to an abrupt end in the early hours of 29 May 1453 when Gennadios fled the monastery on news that the Ottoman Turks had broken through the Land Walls and were taking over Constantinople.³⁸ Gennadios was subsequently appointed patriarch of Constantinople by sultan Mehmed II (1451–1481), who thus ensured that one institution survived the end of the empire even if the court and the monasteries did not.

³⁶ Speake 2002: 39–93. ³⁷ Miller 1997: 12–21. ³⁸ Doukas, *History* 36.3.

CHAPTER 2
BYZANTINE BOOKS

INMACULADA PÉREZ MARTÍN

Recent research on Byzantine manuscripts and new technologies have produced an extraordinary amount of information about the material aspects of the Byzantine book, writing styles (although work on some periods is less advanced than on others),¹ reading, and literacy.² Meanwhile, an entire generation of philologists has begun to consider Byzantine manuscripts as more than just an auxiliary matter, and they are becoming interested in the dialectic relationship between the message and the medium. Palaeography, a discipline that operates between history and philology, is not confined to the study of writing but analyzes Greek codices and literature in the context of Byzantine material culture.

It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to give a classification of Byzantine books or to explain the production process in detail.³ Nor can we focus on books linked to the liturgy, ecclesiastical organization, monasticism, dogma, and theology, which in a Christian civilization such as Byzantium present a more varied and rich typology than the secular book. Decoration and illumination were practically a prerogative of sacred books, as there are few manuscripts with secular contents that contain illustrations.⁴ A few do so, such as the Madrid Skylitzes (Biblioteca Nacional, Vitr. 26–2), a chronicle whose famous illustrated version may have served a function in diplomatic relations between Byzantium and Norman Sicily; in addition, certain scientific and technical books on geometry, astronomy, medicine, botany, veterinary science, and siege warfare had illustrations where they were necessary or useful for understanding the text. Moreover, secular books were not copied in gold or on purple parchment, although these features were characteristic of some imperial documents. In the eleventh century, Eustathios Boilas begins the inventory of his books (in his will) with the paradigm of the luxury

¹ Two recent manuals on Greek palaeography are Crisci and Degni 2011 and Perria 2012.

² Cavallo 1982 and 2007; Oikonomides 1988. Holmes and Waring (2002) only scratch the surface of the problem of Byzantine literacy, and generally ignore the contributions of palaeography.

³ For manuscripts as material evidence, see Hoffmann 1998; Géhin 2005. For introductions to the Greek book, see Hunger 1989; Irigoien 2001.

⁴ Buonocore 1996; Lazaris 2010; Bernabò 2011.

book: a Gospel in gold ink with the portraits of the evangelists and a valuable binding, which he calls his “precious or rather my priceless treasure.”⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, it is difficult to find manuscripts more modest than those used by monastic communities in southern Italy and the Balkans for the liturgy or the edification of the monks: these were produced on irregular parchment, not infrequently a palimpsest, by copyists with few notions of orthography. The image presented by the Greek manuscripts copied at the end of the Byzantine period in outlying ecclesiastical territories, from Cyprus and Palestine to the Peloponnese, Epirus, and Apulia, is not much better.

BOOK OWNERS

Contrary to what became customary in the nineteenth century, Byzantine books were not displayed on shelves (the projecting headcaps of the bindings also prevented manuscripts from being aligned vertically). They were kept in cabinets or cupboards, no doubt under lock and key. The photo of the post-Zola intellectual posing with his back to his library would have been impossible. Inside, the manuscripts lay flat on the cover, with metal bosses protecting the skin from friction and the contents written in ink on the cut side (the edge opposite the spine). The chest or *kibotion* was a piece of furniture to be placed in the work room, whose existence we know from various sources,⁶ but there is also evidence that reading and study could take place in the open air, in porticos with benches like those which formed an essential part of libraries in antiquity. In the twelfth century, pupils at the school of the Holy Apostles would walk beneath the porticos carrying sheets of paper (*chartas*) under their arms and reading the texts aloud in order to learn them by heart.⁷ Documents were also kept in *kibotia* and, of course, not all books were protected by wooden boards; they could be protected by sheets of parchment (a more fragile way) or in individual boxes.

Wilson defined the Byzantine book as a “commodity beyond the reach of the ordinary man,”⁸ and indeed the prices of codices were high relative to basic necessities. A modest copy of the Psalter made by St. Neilos of Rossano in the tenth century cost one *nomisma*, and in 913/14 Arethas of Caesarea paid twenty-six *nomismata* for a copy of some ecclesiastical writers,⁹ when one *nomisma* would buy a hundred kilos of wheat (eight

⁵ Parani 2007: 169.

⁶ See, for example, the one Konstantinos Akropolites had in his house and which he called *oikiskon*: Constantinides 1982: 141, 163–164.

⁷ Flusin 2006: 76. ⁸ Wilson 1975: 3.

⁹ Par. Gr. 451 consists of 403 folios of very high quality parchment, but of medium size, 242 × 188 mm. On the price of books in general, see Kravari 1991; Wilson 1975: 7–8; Cavallo 2007: 174–175.

modioi thalassioi) and fifteen *nomismata* would get a mule.¹⁰ A luxury binding, with pearls and precious stones, could cost as much as 500 *nomismata*.¹¹ Bearing these facts in mind, we can understand why the inventories of personal libraries are limited to one or two dozen books. By the eleventh century, landowners such as Eustathios Boilas, Gregory Pakourianos, and Michael Attaleiates had larger libraries, and these in turn were surpassed by some monastic inventories, such as that of the monastery of St. John of Patmos with hundreds of volumes, even the same text in multiple copies. Needless to say, in this context the significance of a volume that was produced to be read and consulted changes: in its new home to which it has arrived as a gift or bequest, the book will not be read but considered as a piece of property, an asset, easily sold in time of need. This was the case with ms. Paris BNF Gr. 2934 (Demosthenes; preserved in the monastery of Sosandra) and the famous Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarke 39 (Plato; preserved in St. John of Patmos). Eustathios of Thessalonike denounces the ease with which monks disposed of copies from their library, but there was also the opposite danger, that a book would remain “buried” in the library of a monastery. To prevent this risk, Isaac Komnenos, founder of the *Kosmosoteira* monastery, mentioned in his will that the book with poems, letters, and *ekphraseis* he had composed should be available to readers.¹²

In Byzantium there was no book trade as an activity independent of the book production process. The reason that books were not copied without prior commission was no doubt the initial investment of labor and material required; also the fact that such a trade in a largely demonetized society could be risky, at least until the fifteenth century, when Italian humanists were added as potential clients. The well-known problems that Byzantine intellectuals faced in obtaining parchment or paper had a similar basis: few scholars could accumulate writing material in sufficient quantity to avoid being dependent on the arrival of ships with Italian paper or the slaughter of spring lambs.¹³ The cost of paper was half or less that of parchment. Italian paper (characterized by watermarks) rapidly prevailed in Byzantium (from the mid-fourteenth century it was in general use) and devastated the local mills through dumping, imposing its prices. Contrary to common belief, these were not necessarily lower than local prices.

Unlike in the west, in Byzantium it was not common for the copying of books to be organized and sped up by the dismemberment and distribution

¹⁰ Oikonomides 2002: 591; Morrisson and Cheynet 2002: 823. ¹¹ Cutler 2002: 581.

¹² Cavallo 2007: 141, 149. On the appreciation of books by their owners, see Cavallo 1981: 397–398; Grünbart 2004.

¹³ On the difficulty of obtaining materials, see Wilson 1975: 2.

of the *antigraphon* or model among several copyists, enabling the production of pseudo-mechanized copies without a pre-arranged buyer.¹⁴ It is also unthinkable that otherwise established and organized copying centers (all of them monasteries such as Stoudios since the ninth century, St. John Prodromos of Petra in the twelfth and fifteenth, and Hodegos in the fourteenth) would produce manuscripts for intermediary dealers who would then look for buyers. The colophons of these manuscripts never mention any transaction of this type: their sole protagonists are the scribe, the customer, and the recipient, who were not always the same person.

SCRIBES

Future generations may consider writing by hand a relic of the past, but only in the second half of the twentieth century did handwriting cease to form an essential component of elementary education. Before digital publishing (and more so before the printing press), being able to write in a neat and legible way was required of clerical work, but it was also a way for private individuals to earn a living and obtain copies of literary, technical, or religious works. If copying out manuscripts had been the prerogative of a professional class in the imperial or patriarchal administration, or of a select group of monks in each community,¹⁵ we would be able to identify the hands of the same scribes over and over again, and they would more often have signed their work with a personal colophon, a poem, or in some other way to increase the value of the book. But in Byzantium only a small part of book production was done by professionals, and to an even lesser extent was it organized into *scriptoria*, a name perhaps applicable in Byzantium only to the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople.

Until the end of the eleventh century, copyists largely kept to the use of a calligraphic and legible library hand, which makes it more difficult to distinguish individuals, but from then onwards, especially after the recovery of Constantinople in 1261, there was a widespread revival of higher education. Non-professional copying seems to have become more frequent and some copyists chose a less legible type of writing, perhaps in haste to keep up with demand. Indeed, in Palaiologan Constantinople there flourished not only scribes who copied a text in order to own it themselves, but also those who helped out in copying a text in a study group because the teacher had asked for it, or who collaborated to copy a book that was available only temporarily and had to be copied quickly. In that period there were dozens, or even hundreds, of low-cost scribes lacking a professional background and with irregular, even hesitant, handwriting, but we owe to them many of the Palaiologan copies we have. It is not rare

¹⁴ Canart 1998. ¹⁵ On the social groups to which scribes belonged, see Cutler 1981.

to find volumes that collected the work of ten to twenty scribes, reflecting all levels of expertise and styles, from the most traditional to the most common, which was coordinated to obtain a volume with, say, all the commentators on Aristotle (Laur. Plut. 58.1) or a complete mathematical and astronomical corpus (Vat. Gr. 191).¹⁶ They collaborated to create monumental books that aspired to reflect the totality and, no doubt, the immortality of the authors they collected.

WRITING IN SCHOOL

If the book has value as a symbol of social and economic class and is the prerogative of the moneyed classes or ecclesiastical bodies,¹⁷ it is also the starting point for any thinking that arises from the solitary exercise of reading. Training for this activity began, of course, at school, and several manuscripts of ancient literature still show the signs of their frequent use by students seeking to master more advanced registers of Greek.¹⁸ At the elementary stage, pupils would not necessarily own a book or even have one at their disposal: memorization played a key role in learning (some Byzantines boasted of having learnt whole books by heart),¹⁹ and ephemeral materials such as wax tablets were also used. Access to texts must have been necessary only for more advanced teaching. In the famous miniature of the Madrid Skylitzes depicting a philosophy class (fol. 134), the students share books on their desks and stand up holding them to recite the lesson. Small and medium-sized miscellanies, with basic texts of grammar, rhetoric, and vocabulary, were likely the student's first (or only) book.²⁰ Scarcity of resources and poor materials may together be responsible for our having far fewer examples of this type of book from the Macedonian and Komnenian periods than the Palaiologan,²¹ but this cannot be the only explanation for the following rule in the transmission of texts: texts chosen to complete the learning of language through miscellanies come in ever-decreasing sizes and ever-greater internal variety over time. Macedonian codices were conceived as collections of the corpora of ancient authors in a single volume (or in two or three volumes, when they would not fit in one, as with Plato and Plutarch); but we do not know if they were just copies of manuscripts from late antiquity or an innovative way of preserving a heritage that in the ninth and tenth centuries was safeguarded in stages (prose before poetry, philosophy before history). Only from the

¹⁶ Bianconi 2004. ¹⁷ Parani 2007: 174; Holmes 2010: 138.

¹⁸ On school books in the Middle Ages, see del Corso and Pecere 2010. ¹⁹ Cavallo 1981: 400.

²⁰ On miscellaneous manuscripts, see Ronconi 2007.

²¹ A tenth-century codex fitting this profile is Laur. Plut. 59.15, with ancient rhetorical works chosen as models for different types of composition.

generations of Photios and Leo VI onward was the effort significant enough for libraries to be recognizable.

Unfortunately, obtaining copies of these *opera omnia* of classical authors was out of reach for most, so that the majority of manuscripts preserve only selections of these corpora. Increasingly, special miscellanies of authors of a genre were created, even mixing ancient models with their Byzantine imitators, as is the case in various thirteenth-century miscellany manuscripts. Of the seven pieces by each tragedian and the plays of Aristophanes, only three were chosen; from ancient oratory only a few speeches by different authors (together with the ubiquitous *Characteres epistolici*, epistolary model exercises attributed to Libanios); and some dialogues of Plato. So, at the end of Byzantium, we find unprecedented collections including sections of works (such as book two of Thucydides, book one of the *Cyropaideia*) and isolated pieces such as the *Electra*, *Seven against Thebes*, *Plutus*, Demosthenes' *De corona*, or the *Panathenaicus* of Aelius Aristeides. Not all miscellanies, however, had a classicist profile. When a Byzantine reader decided to collect his favourite texts into a volume, it was likely to include John of Damascus, Anastasios of Sinai, Basil of Caesarea, Maximos the Confessor, and many short and anonymous texts, especially poems.²²

At the next level of training, students had to deal with Aristotelian logic (preserved in hundreds of copies, and even recommended by Theodore the Stoudite to his monks), the *Elements* of Euclid, and some basic works of geometry and astronomy such as Nikomachos of Gerasa, Heron, and Kleomedes. Acquiring culture meant internalizing this knowledge, and to that end students would read widely and take notes from these readings: the *Bibliotheke* of Photios is, in some respects, the product of such an activity, albeit carried out at a mature phase and on a vast scale. But other scholars such as Nikephoros Gregoras refrained from literary criticism and only copied out sentences, paragraphs, or curious words from their readings; others, such as Gregory of Cyprus, copied entire works of Aristotle and a wide selection of ancient oratory, thus at least saving the cost of a scribe. Based on this initial core of written materials that were learned by heart (as shown by the absence of indexes in many of them), it was the personality, skill, and ability of each student that then marked his progress.²³

THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL WORK

Unfortunately, the material evidence for intellectual work is limited to its final product, manuscript books, as the “working papers” of Byzantine

²² See the case of the *Kephalaia* of Chariton of Hodegos (Par. Gr. 1630, fourteenth century): Pérez Martín 2011.

²³ Wilson 1996.

authors have been lost in almost all cases where they did not originally take the form of bound notebooks (in inventories, unbound books are mentioned as *tetradia*; in some cases, the traces left in manuscripts by their use reveals that they remained unbound for a long time).²⁴ The *translatio studiorum*, the transfer to the west of much of the Greek heritage and its organization in libraries, as well as the long night of Greek secular culture in the eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman rule, explain this loss; the same applies to the bad-quality or fragmentary copies of texts that did not survive the creation of organized, modern libraries, since their low quality prevented them from being catalogued and preserved. It was not unusual for a single annotated sheet to end up bound into a volume among whose pages it is found. For example, in Par. Gr. 2396, containing the commentary of Theon of Alexandria on Ptolemy's *Mathematike syntaxis*, Nikephoros Gregoras needed a scrap of paper to complete the astronomical calculations begun in the margin of fol. 29. Now this piece of paper, in his own hand, is bound between fols. 28 and 29. Flyleaves, in addition to being fragments of other codices, could be recycled drafts of documents, letters, or short literary compositions;²⁵ they were also a favourite place for notes, personal information, lists of goods, or reminders of basic knowledge. These are the rather pitiful ways in which the working materials of the Byzantine scholars have survived. The information they provide about how composition took place in material terms is in general poorer than that given in the works themselves, which clearly show their origins in *schede* or *hypomnematismoi* ("notes and memoranda"), such as we find in the *Bibliotheke* of Photios, the *Semeioseis gnomikai* (*Sententious Notes*) of Theodore Metochites, and some minor works by Michael Psellos which are little more than reading or lecture notes.

The margins of manuscripts owned by scholars contain a more direct and simple record of intellectual work, even if they were only the first steps of reflections that were later to become independent works. John Pediasimos decided to compose his manual of geometry (a popular version of Heron) after discussing the *Elements* of Euclid in the margin of Laur. Plut. 28.2.²⁶ In the margins, a Byzantine author may talk to or argue with the ancient writer who normally occupies the central text.²⁷ He occasionally corrects the text or adds variants from a copy borrowed from another colleague. He may highlight information that interests him, recompile it elsewhere, explain a complicated theorem by applying it to a concrete problem, and gather comments on passages through a complex system of

²⁴ As in a famous copy of Maximus of Tyre and Albinus, Par. Gr. 1962: Whittaker 1974.

²⁵ Pérez Martín 2013b. ²⁶ Pérez Martín 2010.

²⁷ Papaioannou (2012a: 298) has called this omnipresence of ancient writers "the atavistic structure of Byzantine book culture."

reference marks or by using different-coloured ink; alternately, he revises a text, correcting its problems, completing or reorganizing it. For example, Maximos Planudes completely revised many texts that interested him (the *Anthologia Palatina*, Plutarch's *Moralia*); Gregoras edited Synesios' *On Dreams*; and Isaac Argyros reconstructed the lost chapter 2.14 of Ptolemy's *Harmonics*. We still have their autographs of these and other works. When a Byzantine author decided to copy a long text that he or his disciples considered remarkable, the text could take on a life of its own, separate from what the ancient author intended, and find a place in other manuscripts, thus ensuring its conservation. For example, John Pediasimos' short treatise on doubling the cube was originally a note on Aristotle's *Analytica priora* that was finally copied several times as an independent text.²⁸ Argyros' *Instructions for Making a Map of the Inhabited World Proportional to its Place on the Globe* arose from a reading of Ptolemy's *Geography* 1.24; we still have the autograph in Argyros' own copy of the *Geography* (Vat. Gr. 176, fols. 26v–27r), but his *Instructions* circulated separately from Ptolemy's text.²⁹

SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL BOOKS

The appearance and contents of some manuscripts point to their use by professionals in their studies – or in their trunks, when they earned a living by traveling around.³⁰ Reference books were indispensable for judges,³¹ as were pharmacopoeias for physicians,³² lists of the positions of stars and planets for astronomers, and treatises on *Geoponika* for aristocratic landowners.³³ We have no evidence of manuals used by architects or engineers,³⁴ or by navigators, professions that appear to have been learnt from practical experience rather than books. The case of the last profession is significant, given the economic importance of commercial activity. Byzantium preserved many ancient geographical works, but did not produce any independent scientific literature of its own in this field.³⁵ Thus, the possession of a full-blown library seems to have been a feature of the leisure, devotion, or pastime of the man of letters rather than of the expert in a profession.

In the fields of knowledge mentioned above, the manuscript evidence may hide or distort the real picture of the use of books. The existence of hundreds of codices of Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, Ptolemaic astronomy, and Euclidean geometry cannot be taken at face value as evidence of a high level of scientific practice in Byzantium. A cursory

²⁸ Pérez Martín 2010: 115. ²⁹ Laue and Makris 2002. ³⁰ Pérez Martín 2007.

³¹ Gastgeber 2010. ³² Degni 2012. ³³ Lefort 2002: 297–299. ³⁴ Ousterhout 2008.

³⁵ Koder 1991: 62.

examination of these manuscripts is enough to establish that they were often not annotated and therefore were perhaps read but were probably not used for practical purposes. Those who used Ptolemy's *Tables* to calculate an eclipse would note the date of their calculations, just as a physician who studied Galen's *De alimentorum facultatibus* in depth would "enhance" the work with local variations or his own experience. As far as geometry was concerned, it formed part of the school curriculum, and the most elementary texts had a clear application in the measurement of land for tax purposes (geodesy).

This dichotomy of practice versus theory that characterized Greek higher learning throughout its history becomes more acute and problematic in areas of study that were also professional vocations. It would be reductive to classify scientific manuscripts into library or reference copies on the one hand and copies for practical, everyday use on the other. It would likewise be a mistake to draw too strict a distinction between copies of ancient authors with pretensions to be complete, in large format, with wide margins and careful writing, and modest copies, worn through use, of secondary materials born from the debasement and fragmentation of the ancient heritage, from incomprehensible translations from Arabic, personal experience in dealing with diseases, or observing the stars. Although both categories are justifiable, a good part of our scientific manuscripts would not fall clearly into one group. Especially in the Macedonian era, it is not uncommon to find codices that dignify through their elegant appearance miscellanies of anonymous pseudo-scientific texts.³⁶

A STORY OF LOSS AND RECOVERY

The scholar who frequents famous libraries may be inspired by the beauty of the buildings and reading rooms to reflect on the passage of time: What occasioned the conservation of all that we value today, and what led to the loss of books documented in the past? Unfortunately, the declared aim of a book to preserve its contents from the "abyss of oblivion" was often difficult to achieve.³⁷

Common sense indicates that what was most likely to survive was anything considered valuable enough to enjoy high standards of protection: kept away from inexperienced or potentially harmful hands, in suitable binding, and stored in good conditions, away from dampness and light. Indeed, it was enough for one link in the chain to break for the text to be lost (if for

³⁶ Marc. Gr. 299 is the oldest known compendium of alchemy. The codex, of large size (305/10 × 240 mm), was copied at the beginning of the tenth century in "bouletée" writing, on good-quality parchment. Laur. Plut. 28.34 is an elegant calligraphic copy from the mid eleventh century containing astrological works.

³⁷ Grünbart 2004: 115; Cavallo 2007: 173–191.

generations a book found no reader, or its guardians did not appreciate its value). Yet those that do survive suggest that, from the ninth century onward, there were to some extent two complementary processes of survival: in the late thirteenth century some of the works that Photios had been able to read were no longer available (e.g. Ktesias, Eunapios, or Nikomachos' *Theologoumena arithmeticae*); but in the ninth century there is no trace of the circulation of Xenophon's *Hellenika* or Diophantos, which were certainly read and studied in the Palaiologan period.

In the history of the conservation of Byzantine books that begins with the cultural recovery of the late eighth century³⁸ and is manifested in the copying of manuscripts on parchment – still sometimes in capitals but soon in a minuscule descended from the cursive of late antiquity – the definitive watershed was not 1453, but 1204. The fall of the city to the Turks was a death foretold that had convinced the owners of large libraries such as Manuel Chrysoloras and Bessarion to transfer them to Italy, where they knew that Greek books would be appreciated and safer. But in 1204 Constantinople was sacked and burned without any prior warning, and a considerable part of the libraries, such as that of the high official and historian Niketas Choniates, had not yet been removed to safety. We know of works of art that were moved out of the city, but manuscripts seem to have been the most vulnerable victims of the fire and looting, which destroyed forever texts that had probably been read since the time of Photios. Perhaps the frequent use of paper in the copying of books from the eleventh century onwards was an important factor in the wholesale destruction. This is evident in the considerable drop in the number of books from the Komnenian period, which is inexplicable given the high quality and quantity of literary composition and the high level of scholarship in the twelfth century.

In any case, those grim dates of 1204 and 1453 also marked the beginning of a rebirth of intellectual activity, spurred on by the same urgency to save what could be saved. The Macedonian, Komnenian, and Palaiologan periods were eras of cultural splendor that had a different relationship with books; their protagonists had a different way of working and different objectives, in part due to the material conditions. The written evidence matches what the texts themselves suggest, namely that the boundaries of knowledge reached their greatest extent at the end of the Macedonian era. But Palaiologan manuscripts leave no doubt that it was then, in that final stage of Byzantium, when a greater number of people had access to higher education. Copying books became a parallel and complementary activity to literary and intellectual production; it reached a high level of refinement and professionalism, and proclaimed its love for the Greek past.

³⁸ Mango 1975.

CHAPTER 3
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

STEPHANOS EFTHYMIADIS

As a performance of philosophical debate or a literary form, dialogue was born in classical Athens and was nurtured by its democracy. Plato, Thucydides, and the classical playwrights were its founding fathers and greatest representatives, reflecting a society where exchanging and questioning views in public was of primary significance. Yet far from dying out along with Athenian democracy, dialogue demonstrated a remarkable resilience and assumed many different forms thereafter. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when public debates were not a social right per se, it came to be associated with symposia and their literature, the rewriting of Greek philosophy (e.g. by Cicero), and the re-adaptation of Greek theatrical forms in Roman tragedy and comedy. Moreover, in Lucian's satirical and subversive works, dialogue assumed a new literary dimension, which contributed to the popularity of the genre in later times.

ΕΡΟΤΑΠΟΚΡΙΣΕΙΣ: A FURTHER FORM OF CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Although Christianity came to require a belief in revealed dogma as “the single truth,” it did not reject dialogue as a means for communicating its messages. Dogma itself was an inexhaustible source of questions stemming from believers and dissenters alike. In a sense, to understand Christian dogma means to tackle the questions that it generates. Since its literary inception, dialogue had placed more weight on the views of one of the featured interlocutors whose arguments, following a conversation set up by the author, finally prevail over those of the others in the conversation. In other words, the quest for the truth was exemplified by charismatic men whose overall performance granted authority to specific positions. These gained in strength and persuasion if they resulted from a “lively” dialogue, and so the literary format of the ancient dialogue could be turned to propaganda and proselytism.

The Church Fathers of late antiquity and later Byzantine scholars (whether theologians or not) were aware of the persuasive power of this form of writing, and several of them developed it creatively. Its survival offers a partial response to a recent rejection of Christian forms of dialogue

as inauthentic.¹ True, the question-and-answer format as developed in Christian literature may be seen as controlled learning that produces fixed responses.² Still, we must consider that similar questions and themes were treated differently by different authors – a problem that has affected the study of Byzantine literature as a whole, where modern blanket condemnations occlude the diversity of the material – and we must also consider the specific historical circumstances of each dialogue, i.e. what lay behind its production. In that respect, a quick glance at the substantial corpus of Byzantine dialogues leaves a different impression. Regardless of whether they were drawing from standard and easily identifiable sources, authors of dialogic forms of literature were the least prone to repeat and recycle former material (say, compared to historians or orators). In fact, any inquiry must, first and foremost, acknowledge the genre's dialectic: questions were motivated by an intellectual impulse that was not confined to the elite. It expresses doubts (religious, philosophical, or moral) targeting the established order. Answers, in turn, were meant to shut off such reactions and authoritatively reaffirm Orthodoxy, but with unknown success.

Christian dialogue was didactic, at first drawing inspiration from Jesus' sermons in the Gospels and his conversations with his disciples and others. Simple questions in the Synoptics raised significant issues and elicited responses in the form of either a sermon or a parable. The Gospel of John, by contrast, tends to feature long discourses between Jesus and others, be they his disciples (chs. 13–17), Nikodemos (3), the Samaritan woman (4), or the Jews (5 and 8). What is more, dialogue in the Gospels was an integral part of the tragic narrative of Christ's passion and his dealings with Jewish and Roman authorities. Though dense and concise, those dialogues inspired the later, more expansive *Passions* where the martyr's audience with the tyrant precedes the gruesome description of the Christian hero's ordeals. However repetitive and stereotyped, these dialogues represented Roman society's valorization of upholding values in public. The message was clear: though defeated by means of bodily violence, the martyr would win over his persecutor in the verbal, spiritual contest that survived the confrontation, unlike his body.

Christian authors adopted dialogue also in accordance with other Greek and Roman literary practices. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (second century) and Methodios of Olympos' *Dialogue on Virginity* (second half of the third century) illustrate a literary rite of passage from "pagan" to

¹ See Cameron's defense (2013 and 2014) against the challenges put forward in Goldhill 2008. For a typology of dialogue in late antiquity and Byzantium, see Ieraci Bio 2006.

² Goldhill 2008: 5.

Christian dialogue, a path that any learned Christian author must have followed in the pre-Constantinian age. In the fourth century, the dialogue form proliferated in new contexts. Many homilies featured dialogues with fictitious opponents and, to a certain extent, the Acts of Church Councils also included sections of dialogic discussion which concluded a given debate over questions of doctrine. “Life-like” conversations, even between divine persons, were integrated into the poems of Romanos the Melodist (sixth century) and the Akathistos Hymn (fifth or sixth century). Their underlying goal was to assess and interpret the paradoxes of Christian doctrine, including the mysteries of Christ’s Nativity, Crucifixion, and miracles.

Dialogic sections also flavored much of late antique monastic literature. Their main mission was to provide spiritual counsel and instruction. For instance, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*) often answer the question of a disciple or a stranger, chiefly regarding the modes and steps of spiritual perfection. In his *vita* by Athanasios of Alexandria, St. Antony engages in oral conflicts with demons and other opponents, thereby enshrining considerable portions of preaching into the narrative. Mark the Hermit’s *Disputation with a Lawyer* dramatizes, in its first part, the divergent perspectives of a monk and a man of the world, while in its second part it boils down the previous discussion for the sake of the monk’s disciples and concludes with a cluster of questions and answers. Finally, the lengthy corpus of the letters of Barsanouphios and John responds to a plethora of questions mostly concerned with practical issues of worship by giving answers filled with spiritual counsel.

Instruction by question and answer took a fully fledged literary form in collections known as *erotapokriseis* in Greek (*Quaestiones et responsiones* in Latin). Circulating sometimes under the names of well-known philosophers (e.g. pseudo-Aristotle’s *Problemata*), ancient collections of questions and answers aspired to create taxonomies of knowledge by offering comprehensible answers to questions of a philosophical, medical, legal, or grammatical nature.³ As such, they fulfilled the needs covered today by a handbook. The emergence of Christian Questions and Answers as a separate genre or format was late, coming about in the fourth century and overlapping for at least two centuries with their production in pagan philosophical circles (e.g. Porphyry’s *Homeric Questions* and *Comprehensive Issues* as well as Damaskios’ *Problems and Solutions regarding First Principles*).

By definition Byzantine *erotapokriseis* were an idiosyncratic form of dialogue, as they were “static” and devoid of a dramatic setting. Only exceptionally did they unfold sequentially, i.e. as a chain of follow-up

³ See Perrone 1990 and 1991.

questions. Yet even in cases where the questions lacked focus on a precise subject, they reflected dialogues and disputations that were taking place “outside the text,” i.e. in society, stemming from religious differences and dissent.⁴ From the literary point of view, they did not rank among an author’s first-rate works (e.g. Psellos’ *De omnifaria doctrina* or Argyropoulos’ *Questions and Answers*) and were kept separate from theological discourse proper (e.g. homiletic, antirrhetical, apologetic, catechetical, or panegyric). This “marginality” explains why they were generally neglected until the dawn of the twenty-first century.⁵

AUTHORITY, YET NOT ALWAYS AUTHENTICITY

Unlike dialogues and florilegia (anthologies), *erotapokriseis* were transmitted under an author’s name, often pseudonymously linked to authoritative figures such as Justin Martyr, Athanasios of Alexandria, or Kaisarios, the brother of Gregory of Nazianzos (extolled by the latter). However arbitrary and fabricated, these attributions are indicative of the authority with which *erotapokriseis* had to be invested in order to survive. Also, compared to dialogues and florilegia, which usually fulfilled a particular polemical function, *erotapokriseis* covered a wider range of topics beyond the strictly doctrinal and apologetic. Their scope could be “topical,” reflecting specific circumstances and a precise intellectual climate, or they could be presented as atemporal, designed as a vademecum. To be sure, such dichotomies are not always easy to trace, because an “encyclopedic” orientation does not rule out a specific objective and, by the same token, questions and answers which seem to respond to current religious anxieties may have not drawn on contemporary material but relied heavily on the Church Fathers.

What must also be taken into account is the personal dimension, the author’s own quest for theological and philosophical answers. The format of the *erotapokriseis* provided a strong incitement and a literary forum for intellectuals to explore serious questions relevant to their philosophical inquiries. Before we brand their choice of topics as naive, we must recall that they were often addressing mixed and sometimes lay audiences. Anastasios of Sinai, Michael Psellos, and Symeon of Thessalonike do not mind treating “popular” concerns alongside more serious ones. Thus no survey of the *erotapokriseis* can present a homogeneous picture.⁶ In terms of

⁴ Cf. Cameron 1991.

⁵ For old but still useful surveys, see Bardy 1932–1933; Dörrie and Dörries 1966. Reflecting their classification as a “minor genre,” *erotapokriseis* are discussed not separately for each period but under their authors in Beck’s handbook of Byzantine theological literature (1959). For recent studies that, however, pay little attention to the collections produced after the eleventh century, see Volgers and Zamagni 2004; Papadopyannakis 2006; Bussièrès 2013.

⁶ Cf. the remarks of Ermilov 2013.

their chronological distribution, late antiquity was the generative matrix for both their entanglement in Christian apologetics and their crystallization in terms of form and subject-matter. In the seventh century they reached their apex, featuring prominently in Maximos the Confessor's theological output. Yet dialogic models of writing were explored by Christian apologists of later centuries too, routinely held to be periods lacking in original theological discourse and leaning on the patristic legacy. Several apologists of the middle and late periods, both secular and ecclesiastical, used the question and answer format to engage with contemporary issues and often produced works of original argumentation. They form a substantial corpus reflecting Church crises and social transformations.

AFTER LATE ANTIQUITY

Written at the end of late antiquity or the dawn of the Dark Age, the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasios of Sinai reflect a world of transition. This collection of 103 pairs has received a great deal of attention in recent years.⁷ As a learned monk, Anastasios must have been the recipient of questions addressed to him by groups of pious Christians (such as the *philoponoi* in Alexandria) in reply to which he laid down basic tenets of Orthodox faith, communal and devotional practices, sexual morality, and moral conduct.⁸ Anastasios addresses a Christian community surrounded by religious opponents and dissenters, tempted by religious syncretism, and overwhelmed by superstitions and popular beliefs. His *Erotapokriseis*, which must have been put together by his disciples in c. 700, after his death, mostly responds to matters that would have preoccupied a lay, not a monastic, audience. Albeit a monk himself, Anastasios is far from considering lay status an impediment to salvation or aberration from holiness. The idea that only monks and ascetics could attain sanctity would have appeared as threatening to Christian solidarity in the age of rising Islam.⁹ Anastasios' collection also echoes the new realities experienced by Christians living under Muslim rule. It is one of very few documents that record contemporary reactions to that irreversible development, and it attests to feelings of anxiety that could not have fitted into the monolithically appeasing discourse of a theological treatise or of hagiography.¹⁰ When confronted with the crucial question (Q 101) whether the evils inflicted upon Christians by Arabs were approved by God or not, Anastasios cites the biblical parallel of the Babylonian captivity of Israel

⁷ For a biographical sketch, see Munitiz 2011: 9–11. The key study remains Haldon 1992: 107–147; also Chrysos 2002.

⁸ On their content, see Munitiz 2011: 11–19, 26–38. ⁹ Haldon 1992: 132.

¹⁰ Dagron 1981: 144–146; 1992: 61–64.

which, though a punishment caused by the sins of the Chosen People, had no permanent effect. However untrue this vision may have proven in the long run, Anastasios tried to reconcile Christians to their new political situation.

The intellectual climate of the end of antiquity is reflected in another contemporary collection of *Erotapokriseis* transmitted under the name of Athanasios of Alexandria, addressed to a certain *archon* Antiochos, and comprising 137 items in the old and untrustworthy edition (but still the only one available). Scholars do not agree whether this collection predates or postdates that of Anastasios, and the possibility that they both use an earlier common source cannot be excluded.¹¹ Generally speaking, pseudo-Athanasios takes up fewer practical issues than Anastasios and is largely interested in the religious practices of Jews, heretics, and pagans. When asked (Q 44) how the illiterate and the barbarian can be convinced that the Catholic Church professes the true faith against all heresies, the anonymous collector contends, apparently against contemporary reality, that, although barbarians have at times occupied Palestine, Christ has not permitted that holy place to be given to them. In the same collection it is worth noting a question (Q 39) that would acquire more meaning during the Iconoclastic controversy: “while God through His prophets professes not to venerate handmade things, why do we venerate icons [and] the cross which, like idols, are the work of craftsmen?” Albeit vague and generic, the answer given here would not have disappointed later iconodules: “unlike the pagans we venerate icons not as gods, but by making manifest the affection and love of our souls in accordance with their depicted figures.”

PHOTIOS' AMPHILOCHIA

Judging by their large and complex manuscript tradition and their translation into Armenian and Slavonic, Anastasios' and pseudo-Athanasios' *Questions and Answers* found wide acclaim in the world of eastern Christianity.¹² Their instructive character, however, accounts for their modest, if not minimal, engagement in religious polemics and doctrinal debates. For those issues, priority was naturally accorded to dogmatic florilegia and dialogues which, by virtue of their focus on specific issues, were regarded as more direct, authoritative, and effective than the diverse and disparate material usually included in *erotapokriseis*. It is no coincidence that the latter format could not easily serve the purposes of anti-Muslim and anti-Iconoclast polemic in the eighth and ninth centuries. More precisely, the refutation of Iconoclasm was conducted through florilegia and antirrhetical treatises made up of excerpts from patristic

¹¹ For the *status quaestionis*, see Macé 2013. ¹² Munitiz 2004.

writings, while a secondary role was occupied by dialogic disputations between fictional personifications of an Iconodule and an Iconoclast. Conversely, in this and other periods dialogues seem to have fared better in the theological refutation of Islam, which was treated more as a heresy than a separate religion.

In this age, generally marked by a revival and flourishing of letters, especially in Constantinople, the only intellectual who wrote *Questions and Answers* was the patriarch Photios. The term “intellectual” stands for one of the many aspects of his multifarious personality, and it applies also to the bulk of his extant literary output that includes the *Amphilochia*, a collection of 329 mostly brief treatises of varied content probably dating from the author’s years of exile (867–877), that is, the interim period between his deposition and return to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople (858–867 and 877–886).¹³

The collection owes its title to its addressee, Amphilochios, metropolitan of Kyzikos and one of Photios’ numerous correspondents. It is his inquiries (*erotemata*, *zetemata*, or *aporemata*) that the patriarch addresses in a prose style declared as unsophisticated in his introduction. In the same preface he claims no originality in what he would set down in the collection as most inquiries had previously been dealt with by the Church Fathers, whereas a few others had preoccupied him elsewhere in his own oeuvre. Modern research confirms that in compiling this collection Photios plundered his own letters, over eighty of which he copied word for word, probably with the assistance of a secretary.¹⁴ Another work that he used in the *Amphilochia* was his *Bibliotheke*. It is in that work that he first reveals his interest in the genre of questions and answers by commenting on the collections by pseudo-Kaisarios (sixth century) and Maximos the Confessor (seventh century).¹⁵

The *Amphilochia* aim, on the one hand, to clarify difficulties arising from passages in Scripture and, on the other, to provide useful information and stock knowledge. In light of this distinction, a dividing line has been drawn between the first 75 items of this collection, which focus on scriptural questions, and the remaining 254 which tend to be shorter, oriented toward more secular and generic topics, and lack a personal tone. Yet, as scriptural questions sometimes appear in the second and more extensive section, and more generic ones among the first 75, this dichotomy is not clear-cut and is rather a matter of proportions.¹⁶ For instance, in Q 51 and 21 respectively, Photios tries to satisfy the curiosity of

¹³ On the chronology of the corpus, see Westerink’s introduction to the edition of Photios’ *Amphilochia*: xvi–xxii; contested by Louth 2006: 211–212.

¹⁴ As presumed by Treadgold 1980: 38–39.

¹⁵ For discussions of the author’s classical interests, see Lemerle 1971: 199–202; Wilson 1983: 114–119. Conversely, Louth 2006 is theologically focused.

¹⁶ For this distinction, which is more complex than presented here, see Louth 2006: 210–211.

those wondering why God created Paradise although he knew that he would expel Adam thereafter, and for what reason, once born, Christ permitted the massacre of the infants (Q 26). By the same token, the second set includes questions on scriptural passages (e.g. Q 157, 159, 161) and in one instance (Q 225) it reproduces a dialogue on the Trinity exchanged between a Christian and a “Hellenizer” (*hellenizon*), i.e. a pagan sympathizer.

Regardless of the fact that he draws on patristic writings, Photios generally avoids invoking the authority of the Church Fathers in his argumentation. He follows the path of interpreting Scripture from Scripture, thereby adopting a “philological” method, which sometimes resorts to linguistic interpretations of the Attic meaning and usage of the keywords in a passage (Q 21, 24, 34, 42). Collecting all these questions was likely prompted by Photios’ general literary endeavor to gather all the knowledge that existed on a certain topic and enrich it with his own comments or expertise (as in his *Bibliotheke* or *Lexikon*). At the end of Q 80, which treats the gnomic wills (*gnomika thelemata*) of Christ and draws on Maximos and John of Damascus, Photios humbly states that, should anyone else be up to the task of dealing with this subject in a more extensive and comprehensive way, he would gladly exchange the podium for the student’s desk. In other terms, what he intends here is a comprehensive gathering of patristic testimonies on the topic, not an authoritative and final treatment. But other questions tracked live issues and echoed discussions that must have been taking place among intellectuals or in Church circles of that period. Many times in his extensive correspondence he responds to questions which seem to have been “hot,” and cautions his addressees (laymen and ecclesiastics) to beware of spiritual temptations which, at least for a churchman such as him, were still a threat for the members of the Church. In epp. 33–41 and 214 he appears much committed to such “topical” causes for disputation as the Paulicians, Judaism, and Iconoclasm, whereas he is also occupied with issues like, for instance, the virginity of the Mother of God (ep. 30), St. Paul’s place of origin and Roman identity (ep. 103), or the meaning of circumcision (ep. 205).

But in the *Amphilochia*, consonant with the genre’s “timelessness” and his reticence on personal matters Photios makes no direct allusions to contemporary events, conflicts, or disputes which might have explained the selection of questions. In the few cases when, toward the end of an answer, he concludes with words of spiritual counsel and launches explicit or implicit attacks on paganism, heresy, and Judaism (e.g. Q 64, 65, 74), it is hard to determine whether these are echoes of contemporary polemic or recycled tropes. Beyond the debate over the Latin Church’s addition of the *filioque* to the Creed, Photios as a public figure was involved in several

other religious crises of that time: the end of Iconoclasm, the emergence and suppression of the Paulicians (a dualist religious sect that flourished in ninth-century Asia Minor and was engaged in military activity), and the forced conversion of the Jews under Basil I (867–886).

In his correspondence and *Amphilochia* alike Photios endeavors to re-address and re-confirm the particularities of Orthodox teaching and dogma and take sides openly in a public or interpersonal debate. Rather than promoting his profile as a theologian emulating St. Basil of Caesarea, as has been suggested, Photios was keen to provide a comprehensive spiritual guide that would elucidate Orthodox doctrine even in minute details and clear up the skepticism generated by those estranged from the teachings of the Church.¹⁷

NEW PHILOSOPHICAL DIRECTIONS: THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Two centuries after Photios, another polymath and prolific writer decided to compile a collection which, from its title and structure, may fairly be classified as a type of questions and answers. Psellos belonged to an age that indulged more in secular learning than that of Photios and was preoccupied with mundane concerns.¹⁸ The so-called *De omnifaria doctrina*, a collection of 200 brief treatises followed by an epilogue, encapsulates Psellos' wide philosophical interests and, for all its popularizing tendency, it bears the clear signs of his intellectual identity.¹⁹ The editor of this text distinguished four extant redactions, each of which appears with a different heading, yet they all agree on the name of the dedicatee: the emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), Psellos' pupil. The *De omnifaria doctrina* is divided into sections that treat topics related to theology (1–20), psychology (21–65), ethics (66–82), physics (82–107), physiology (108–119), astronomy (120–138), meteorology–cosmography (139–178), and topics that are in fact excerpted from Plutarch's *Aetia physica* and *Quaestiones convivales* (179–193), and it concludes with brief essays on the soul (194–200), a section that appears in only one redaction.²⁰ Its thematic distribution alone confirms that this work is out of step with the history of the “genre” up to that point for it completely lacks the element of polemic. A closer look at its contents further reveals its encyclopedic character, which ties it in with a more emancipated attitude toward secular knowledge and the sciences.

¹⁷ Louth (2006: 219–221) also questions whether in such an endeavor Photios was fully acquainted with the work of John of Damascus, the epitomizer of Greek Patristic tradition.

¹⁸ Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 133–166.

¹⁹ For Psellos as a polymath and his interest in classifying knowledge, see Duffy 2002.

²⁰ Westerink 1948: 1–14.

The major controversies (both then and now) concerning Psellos revolve around his political and philosophical positions and suggest a wide range of possible motives behind the composition of most of his works. Was the *De omnifaria doctrina* meant to be a philosophical compendium, a handbook of stock knowledge that, in Psellos' estimation, any serious student of Greek literature and science had to know? Be that as it may, in producing this collection Psellos' aim was to instruct his pupil and protector without blending the two traditions (Greek and Christian) but by paying to each its due. In answering the question which *materia prima* God used to make the world, he juxtaposed the Jewish-Christian tradition regarding the creation of the earth and the heavens to that of the Greek philosophers (Q 18). Similar distinctions appear elsewhere, for instance in Psellos' response to questions such as when soul is united to fetus (Q 59) or whether there is any evil in the angels or not (Q 98). In the latter answer he contrasts the assessment of Gregory of Nazianzos, his favorite theologian, to the perception of the same matter by the Greeks.²¹ On another occasion, treating the question whether or not certain people are bewitched by the evil eye, he does not deny that such power can be liberated and spread around, causing sufferings like those stemming from erotic desire (Q 109).

Like all previous compilers of such collections, Psellos cannot claim originality for his "answers." He draws heavily on and quotes various Greek philosophers, giving pride of place to Plato, but not overlooking Aristotle and the Neoplatonists. What must be stressed is his strong dependence on the late great defender of Neoplatonism, Proklos of Athens, whose *Elements of Theology* Psellos sometimes copies verbatim and whose other writings he draws upon heavily too.²² As a matter of fact, it was thanks to Psellos that the interest in Proklos was resuscitated in the eleventh century, resulting among other reasons in a general revival of Greek philosophy. The *De omnifaria doctrina* attests to Psellos' Neoplatonist leanings which, on other occasions, embroiled him in accusations of paganism. The latter, however, never turned into anathematization and condemnation.²³

The man who was to undergo anathema and formal condemnation as an enemy of the truth for endorsing such ideas was John Italos (c. 1025–1083), Psellos' distinguished pupil, and holder after him of the position of Consul of the Philosophers. In 1082, under Alexios I Komnenos, he was registered among the enemies of the faith and his views were anathematized in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a liturgical document celebrating the defeat of Iconoclasm in 843 and the restoration of the right faith. Perhaps out of a desire to emulate his master, Italos produced his own set of *Queries and*

²¹ On Psellos and Gregory, see Papaioannou 2013: 51–87. ²² Jenkins 2006b: 132–133.

²³ See Chapters 26 and 27.

Solutions, which delve into more specific and complex philosophical issues than does the *De omnifaria doctrina*. The content of its ninety-three brief essays is basically philosophical in terms of themes and mode of exposition: it offers answers to queries that would be of relevance only to a top-level student of Greek philosophy. In comparison to his master, Italos allots considerable space to Aristotle and especially his *De interpretatione*,²⁴ yet he also does justice to Plato and the Neoplatonists. In four instances he deals with questions that he presents as allegedly posed by specific contemporaries: Michael VII (Q 50), Nikephoros the *protoproedros* and *droungarios tes vigles* (Q 42), Andronikos [Doukas], oddly styled as *basileus* (emperor: Q 43), and an Abasgian grammarian (Q 64). Of these questions the last two steal the show: the first refers to a puzzle found in the *Odyssey* (19.562ff.) related to dream interpretation, whereas the second revolves around an argument between Italos and the addressee on erroneous Greek usage.²⁵ Little attention is paid to the Christian religion or pertinent theological issues. For instance, Q 77 fleshes out the Lord's command "whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39), first with arguments deriving from pseudo-Dionysios and then as if it were merely a problem of logic.

It is hard to assess whether this rather "disorderly" collection of essays can be reckoned among Italos' "sinful" and "suspect" writings, i.e. the ones that caused him to be charged, inter alia, of intending to introduce "the impious doctrines of the Greeks regarding the earth, the heavens, and the rest of creation, into the Orthodox and Catholic Church," as the article appended to the *Synodikon* puts it.²⁶ A further question is whether this collection, pieced together either by Italos himself or by his pupils later, represents an anthology of Italos' lecture-notes and course-papers or consisted of material intended for some philosophical treatises.

It was during the same century of "enlightenment," parallel to its major representatives and somehow in contrast to them, that Niketas Stethatos (c. 1005–c. 1095) employed the question-and-answer format in order to develop his theological argumentation. Niketas, a theologian of high pretensions active in Constantinople, is mostly known as the spiritual son of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) and a staunch supporter of his master's sanctity. His treatise *On the Soul* largely follows the *erotapokriseis* pattern for covering issues similar or even identical to those that we meet in previous collections, e.g. "with which properties inherent to it, or not, does the soul depart from here?" (Q 13), and "where is the soul taken to after death?" (Q 14). His mode of response indicates that at least some of the questions he poses were not "academic" in character but

²⁴ Trizio 2013. ²⁵ Wilson 1983: 153–155.

²⁶ Gouillard 1967: 57; 1976: 306–315 (reasonably quibbling with the content).

addressed contemporary concerns or a certain ecclesiastical debate. His commitment to the cause of St. Symeon's sanctity against those who distrusted the existence of "new saints" accounts for his interest in the afterlife and the conditions whereby a human person can be deified.²⁷

A person who must have been in close contact with Stethatos was Philip Monotropos, author of the *Dioptra*, a poem consisting of parts in prose and some 7,000 verses. At its core, this work, composed in a simple language in 1095/7, treats theological and philosophical questions in the form of a dialogue between the soul (*psyche*) and the flesh (*sarx*), personified as Mistress and Maid respectively. In response to the former the latter sets forth long answers which generate new questions. Thus, this dialogue, which won tremendous popularity among Byzantines and Slavs alike, bears many external and internal features of the questions-and-answers genre without, however, properly belonging to it.²⁸ As his epithet *monotropos* (solitary) suggests, Philip was a monk, but of unknown provenance and location. The *Dioptra* was the product of his old age. He cites verses from Symeon the New Theologian's hymns and alludes to the "novel" heresy of the Bogomils (a "dualist sect" which attracted imperial attention under Alexios I). This polemic must have been a good reason for the poem to be noticed at least by the ecclesiastical circles of the patriarchate, as can be inferred by a later poem transmitted under the name of the patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111).²⁹ All in all, despite being the work of a less prominent figure than Psellos, Italos, or Stethatos, the *Dioptra* speaks at once of the literary flexibility of the *erotapokriseis* genre and of its capacity to engage with contemporary issues.

MICHAEL GLYKAS AND THE TURBULENT TWELFTH CENTURY

Psellos' legacy had a lasting impact on Byzantine literati, yet the kind of *Questions and Answers* that he and his disciple compiled were an isolated development. In the first place, the intellectual climate of twelfth-century Byzantium somewhat disrupted the philosophically oriented line of Hellenist thinking that had picked up in the previous century. Philosophizing theologians, it has been held, fell victim to the ecclesiastical and political establishment, and an age of repression was inaugurated by Italos' trial and persisted under the Komnenoi dynasty (1081–1185).³⁰ The many intellectuals who were active in this period can be distinguished between figures friendly to this establishment (the majority) and hostile to it (a tiny minority). Despite this general loyalty to the ruling order, the twelfth century was not bereft of ecclesiastical crises, which actually

²⁷ Paschalides 2004. ²⁸ Afentoulidou-Leitgeb 2007.

²⁹ More details in Afentoulidou-Leitgeb 2012a. ³⁰ Browning 1975; Magdalino 1991.

emerged from questions regarding the interpretation of passages in the New Testament and the divine liturgy, the types of questions that had preoccupied the genre so far. The local synods of Constantinople that were convoked in 1156–1157 and 1166–1167 to provide clear answers to them are cases in point.³¹ These were “questions and answers” being acted out in the politics of ecclesiastical life.

Nicholas of Methone, who devoted a work to rebut “novel” ideas in his treatise against Proklos, is in all probability the author of a short set of questions and answers on philosophical-theological topics that is included in manuscripts preserving his *Refutation of Proklos*. In the expectation of a critical edition which would solve the problem of authorship, what is worth noting is the sophisticated tone of the collection and the emphasis it lays on the heretical views of the Manichaeans, an element explained by the contemporary expansion of the aforementioned sect of the Bogomils in the Balkans.³² However, more attention is owed to Michael Glykas, a controversial scholar active under Manuel I. His adventurous life, which included an imperial sentence for high treason, a partial blinding, and years spent in jail (writing poems about being in jail), accompanied a considerable productivity in writing. Apart from a universal chronicle, letters, and a few poems, Glykas’ legacy includes the *Theological Chapters on the Uncertainties of the Holy Scriptures*, structured in tandem as a collection of ninety-six letters addressed chiefly to monks and as a sizeable chain of *erotapokriseis*. Rigorously marshaling excerpts from a rich variety of patristic authors, Glykas reviews in these letters a wide range of topics of pastoral interest and religious polemic (chs. 16, 17, 24) or pertaining to the afterlife and astrological divination. He also makes explicit references to earlier compilers of *erotapokriseis* (Anastasios of Sinai and pseudo-Athanasios). In fact, in their long list of patristic quotations, most of these chapters resemble brief and well-arranged florilegia (anthologies) intertwined with the author’s arguments on a given subject.

Refraining from an explicit attack on the Latins, Glykas treats in chs. 29–30 the issues of the unleavened bread (*azyma*) and *filioque* which had already become the axis of theological opposition to the Church of Rome. In ch. 40 he appears to be fearlessly critical when he touches upon a delicate issue in refuting a short treatise written by the emperor Manuel in defense of astrology.³³ In ch. 79 he picks up a topic which had triggered a theological controversy in the 1160s: the precise meaning of the words “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). These and the other chapters that deal with questions of the afterlife and resurrection of bodies in

³¹ On the theological controversies of the period, see Angold 1995: 82–89; also Chapter 27.

³² On the Bogomils under the Komnenoi, see Angold 1995: 468–501.

³³ Magdalino 2006a: 122–130.

the Second Coming no doubt echo hot contemporary debates, in some of which Glykas was an active participant, or aspired to be.³⁴ After all, the commentaries of contemporary interpreters of Canon Law as well as rhetorical and other literary works of the period (for instance, the dialogue *Timarion* which is chiefly staged in the underworld) suggest that Byzantine society of the age of the Komnenoi was prone to reshuffle several doctrinal positions that had seemed settled since late antiquity, and to reopen long-dormant exegetical issues.

LATE BYZANTIUM

By virtue of their openness to new topics and forms, late Byzantine *erotapokriseis* bear witness to the genre's enduring function as a literary vehicle of doctrinal polemic and spiritual guidance alike. Interestingly, two specimens, engaged with purely theological topics, intertwine with other literary forms and as such exhibit a noteworthy literary originality. Markos Kyrros was likely the author of the anonymous and still unedited *Hagioritic Oration against Gregory Akindynos*. The latter was one of the leading opponents of Gregorios Palamas during the Hesychast controversy of the mid-fourteenth century. This work, a literary hybrid that brings together different kinds of monastic literature, stages a dialogue between a young man eager to learn and an old man who is bent over from illness and whose eyesight is fading. It is the first section only that articulates, in the question-and-answer format, the basic tenets of Orthodox dogma and proceeds to a fierce attack on the "heresy" of Akindynos. Written in c. 1350, it was later extrapolated and used in works of relevant pro-Hesychastic literature.³⁵

The question format dominates the second text, the dialogue of a Muslim with George-Gennadios Scholarios, the narrator and author. The work is the *Questions and Answers on the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ* and was written in 1470, that is, when the former patriarch of Constantinople was in his final monastic retirement in the Monastery of Prodromos near the town of Serres, Macedonia. The dialogue is reported as a real event that occurred in the plain nearby and may plausibly be regarded as an unprecedented literary hybrid straddling the two formats (unless priority for such a "novelty" is given to Philip Monotropos). At its core, Scholarios' text is an exposition of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, mostly on the basis of the Gospels joined by references to the adoption of Christianity by the emperor Constantine and the anticipation of its final victory by pagan oracles.

By contrast, other literati clung to the received model. Markos Eugenikos (c. 1394–1445) compiled nineteen *erotapokriseis* which wind

³⁴ On questions pertaining to afterlife, see Papadoyannakis 2008. ³⁵ Rigo 2013a.

through various queries of the typical sort (why do just people suffer and the sinful prosper, or about the end of the world).³⁶ The lengthiest and most interesting collection comes from Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonike (1416/17–1429), a versatile theological writer. Written in response to another prelate, it consists of eighty-three pairs which review questions mostly pertaining to Canon Law, liturgical practice, and angelology but also extending to more trivial and specific matters like the bishops' and priests' garments. Notably, two questions (Q 8–9) touch upon a vexing set of issues which in nearly similar terms had bedeviled Anastasios of Sinai in the seventh century: Why do the infidels take possession of myriad believers and their babies (no matter whether they are baptized or ignorant of the faith)? Should this not have come about by the will of God? Why do all of them surrender? Also, is God responsible for Adam's transgression and the infidelity of the gentile nations? And, if God is not responsible, how is it that they suffer involuntary temptation and punishment? Symeon interprets these puzzles chiefly in light of Adam's free will (*autexousion*) and by invoking the self-determination of humanity. In fact, anyone expecting a concrete answer here in the fashion of Anastasios of Sinai, who in his Q 101 both denounced the aggressiveness of Arabs and inspired hope in the Christian flock, would likely be disappointed. Symeon's reaction to the advance of the Ottomans was mere adherence to what may be termed "theological abstraction."

Equally challenging are questions which turn up in the collection by John Argyropoulos (1393/4?–1487), a humanist who moved between Byzantium and Renaissance Italy. In response to a Cypriot inquirer, presented as a philosopher and physician in the title, Argyropoulos answers five theological questions (to use his own term) and another seven related to physics and physiology. It is from the first lot that we single out question 4, why the Savior of the world was born of a Jewish mother and was not created like Adam or born of a woman of another people. According to Argyropoulos, the choice is justified first by the Jews being the holiest nation and the closest to God compared to any other and, second, by the fact that Jesus Christ had to be begotten a human person stemming from humans and not like Adam, lest he be taken as a mere phantasm.

Though perhaps incidental, this defense of Judaism stands in contrast to the anti-Jewish literature cultivated throughout the Byzantine period. It offers, however, a good example of the surprising answers that the genre could provide. In a sense, these works constituted a privileged format that could flout the norm of reassuring theological discourse and, despite their frequent drawing on a common reservoir, they could host provocative niches of doubt. This was, after all, a secure place where Byzantines were

³⁶ Ermilov 2013: 114–155.

entitled to express their theoretical contestations of an edifice which appeared shaky to some of its constituents. Questions you would not dare to ask elsewhere could creep in here and be “legalized” as posed under the veil or pretext of innocent ignorance. Whether coming from real or imaginary persons, queries on fundamental concepts or peripheral aspects of Orthodox doctrine and common belief gave the necessary impulse to survey and reexamine authorities and sources, sometimes reinterpret evidence, and finally reaffirm truth in some old or new guise. Depending on the period and circumstances, the problematic of questions and answers did not solely concern small groups of intellectuals but extended to the man in the street, in church, or in the monastery. Those who tried their hand at this genre had the liberty to enshrine all sorts of questions and begin the quest for the truth from the start. Whether the answers worked out by such processes were ultimately appeasing and satisfactory or left matters pending, we shall never know. Their value lies in representing a Byzantine thought-world in creative mobility and in providing ample material for reflecting on issues that are still of interest today.

CHAPTER 4

CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP: THE BYZANTINE CONTRIBUTION

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Did the Byzantines make a contribution to classical scholarship? Today many western classicists assume that they did not, because the texts, ideas, information, and assumptions we have inherited from the Byzantines are simply taken for granted now and are rarely explicitly attributed to their sources. This assumption can lead to a distorted understanding both of ancient literature and of modern classical scholarship, for, whether we like it or not, the Byzantines provide the stained-glass window through which we glimpse the literature of ancient Greece. This window has two components: selective transmission and exegesis.

The Byzantines played a vital role in transmitting works of ancient literature, for, with the exception of a small body of literary papyri, we have only the Greek literature that they chose to copy. And manuscript transmission in the Byzantine world was a deliberately selective filter. The Byzantines did not, like Renaissance copyists in the west, seize with enthusiasm upon any piece of ancient Greek literature they found and copy it; they had too much ancient literature available to make that approach feasible. Nor did they have the random approach that sometimes appears to have operated in the medieval west, with less important texts copied at the expense of more important ones because dispersal of resources over a wide area and frequently low levels of education meant that the scholars who wanted a particular text and the ones who possessed it were often unaware of each other's existence. In comparison to their western counterparts, the Byzantines had an educated, well-informed network of scholars equipped with good reference works in a centralized system; they knew what ancient literature was available, and they made a conscious selection of that literature to meet their needs.

Their needs in this respect were very different from ours. In the early period the Byzantines were far more interested in prose than in poetry, and they preferred ancient works of historical, antiquarian, philosophical, rhetorical, or scientific value to those of the imagination. Because one of the Byzantines' main goals in reading ancient literature was to write good classicizing prose themselves, they had a preference for Atticizing writers. It is their tastes, not those of the ancients, that have given us a corpus of Greek literature containing vast quantities of imperial-period prose (e.g.

Plutarch, Lucian, Aelius Aristeides, and Libanios) but only tiny amounts of archaic poetry and non-Aristophanic comedy. The preferences of Byzantine scholars have thus shaped the corpus of Greek literature as it now exists: if they had made different choices, we would now have a completely different view of ancient Greece.

The Byzantines also provide us with the exegetical, grammatical, and lexicographical tools that, even if they are not often explicitly cited today, lie at the root of much of our understanding of ancient literature and of the Greek language. Many of these tools, of course, were created not by the Byzantines themselves but rather by scholars of the Hellenistic and Roman periods – but as with the literature itself, it is the Byzantines who selected which scholarly works to preserve and which to consign to oblivion. And unlike the literature, the ancient scholarly works were often significantly rewritten by Byzantine writers who abridged, expanded, and combined material from different sources. The Byzantines were thus able to choose not only which works to preserve, but also which aspects of those works would predominate; sometimes their selections would have surprised the original authors. Byzantines also created scholarly works of their own, and those works tell us most of what we know about some ancient texts and their authors. Our debt to works such as the *Souda* and Photios' *Bibliothēke* is now largely invisible, because the material derived from them is cited rarely as such, but as the already extracted and numbered fragment of this or that ancient author; yet if all the information that depends ultimately on those sources were to be removed from modern scholarship, the loss would be highly noticeable.

Lastly, the Byzantines are responsible for many aspects of the way Greek texts are presented today. Our Greek texts are printed in their version of the Greek alphabet, not that of the ancients, and we use Byzantine conventions for diacritics and word division (see below).

Byzantine scholarship is also interesting in itself, quite apart from what it tells us about antiquity. The Byzantines developed complex systems of exegesis and analysis that are, in many cases, completely unlike anything used today. At the same time, Byzantine classical scholarship is a forbidding field, because there is a very large amount of it and virtually none of it has been translated. This means that significant discoveries can still be made, and there is fundamental work remaining to be done – many Byzantine scholarly texts are either wholly unedited or published only in inadequate and severely outdated editions, and good studies of the scholars and their works are often lacking.

OUTLINE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN BYZANTINE SCHOLARSHIP

The earliest works of Byzantine classical scholarship come from the school tradition and are concerned with Greek grammar and orthography. They

follow closely the late antique school tradition, from which there had evidently been no break. In the Byzantine period, as in late antiquity, there was a major gap between the Greek language as spoken in casual conversation and the same language as written by educated men and women. The origins of this gap can be traced to the early imperial period, particularly the second century CE, when writers began to imitate the language of fifth- and fourth-century BCE Athens. Following a natural process that affects all languages with native speakers, spoken Greek had evolved gradually over the centuries, so that by the second century CE it was considerably different from any of the varieties spoken in the fifth century BCE. Initially the written language had evolved as well (though not as much as the spoken language, owing to the greater conservatism of writing), but in the early empire a movement known as Atticism led increasing numbers of writers to imitate the classical language very closely. Such imitation, because it entailed producing written Greek very different from the writers' spoken language, required a significant amount of education and led to the creation of specialized reference works detailing features of the classical language that were no longer obvious to native speakers.

The birth of the Atticist movement did not, of course, stop the evolution of the ordinary spoken language, so during the late antique and Byzantine periods spoken and written Greek drifted further and further apart, making the written standard increasingly difficult to achieve. More and more linguistic literature was therefore needed to help bridge the gap. For example, the vowels written in the fifth century BCE with iota, epsilon iota, eta, eta iota, upsilon, and omicron iota had at that period all been pronounced differently from one another, but starting in the Hellenistic period they gradually fell together so that in the Byzantine period (as in the modern language) all these vowels were pronounced identically. Naturally this change made learning to spell difficult for Greek speakers, so manuals of orthography became common. Works on accentuation, inflection, and other grammatical topics were also needed. Many of these works were prescriptive, designed to enable their users to write Greek that looked educated, but some were aimed primarily at readers of ancient texts, and some (especially among the glossaries) were useful for both purposes.

This is the context in which we find the first significant Byzantine scholar, George Choïroboskos, who lived in the eighth and ninth centuries. Choïroboskos' works, which cover a wide range of grammatical, orthographical, accentual, and exegetic topics, all seem to have been designed for use in schools; none of them is much respected today, because the information they contain is now considered fairly basic, but in their time and for centuries afterwards they had considerable importance. The best known of the works attributed to Choïroboskos are the *Epimerismi* ("Parsings"), sets of grammatical and exegetic information on

difficult texts; the *Epimerismi on the Psalms* bear his name explicitly, and the anonymously transmitted *Epimerismi Homerici* are probably his work as well. Other works include a *Commentary on Theodosios' Canons*, a *Commentary on the Techne of Dionysios Thrax*, a *Commentary on Hephaestion's Encheiridion*, and works *On Prosody* and *On Orthography*.¹

Other notable scholars around the time of Choïroboskos are Charax (who also wrote a *Commentary on Theodosios' Canons*), Theognostos (who also wrote an *On Orthography*), and Michael Synkellos. Michael produced the popular and highly influential *Treatise on the Syntax of the Sentence*, a textbook on correct (i.e. classicizing) syntax.²

Byzantine contributions to our understanding of ancient literature begin in the ninth century with Photios, who is often considered the most important Byzantine scholar. Photios' influence was responsible for the preservation of some ancient texts that would otherwise have been lost, and his own work drew on, and thus preserves fragments from, many other works that were indeed lost after his time. His main work in this connection is the *Bibliothēke* ("Library"), an enormous literary encyclopedia covering a wide range of prose authors from the classical to the early Byzantine periods (poetry is excluded, in keeping with ninth-century interests). It consists of 280 entries providing summaries and critical discussions of books Photios had read, and because of the subsequent disappearance of many of Photios' sources these entries are now treasure troves of information. Photios also produced an enormous Greek dictionary, including primarily prose words, known as the *Lexikon*, as well as some other works of lesser relevance to classical scholarship.³

Another important development of this period was the change to minuscule script. At the beginning of the Byzantine period manuscripts were written in a script inherited from antiquity; the letters of this script were distinct from one another and easy to read, but it was slow to write and not very efficient in its use of space. In a gradual change centered on the ninth century, Byzantine scribes switched to using a new script known as minuscule, which was faster to write and allowed more text to be fitted onto a page. Minuscule was not, however, as easy to read as its predecessor, and therefore its use was generally accompanied by two other innovations that have since become indispensable to readers of Greek: word division and systematic use of diacritics.

¹ For Choïroboskos, see Wilson 1983: 69–74; Kaster 1988: 394–396; Egenolff 1887 and 1888: 17–21; Dickey 2007: 80–81 (please note that in this chapter strings of references are normally given in declining order of usefulness, as measured by the quantity of information provided and how up-to-date it is). For Choïroboskos' date, which has been established only relatively recently, see Theodoridis 1980.

² Donner 1982; Alpers 1964; Robins 1993: 149–162; Cunningham 1991; Egenolff 1888.

³ For Photios see Wilson 1983: 89–119 and 1994; Treadgold 1980; Hägg 1975; Schamp 1987 and 2000.

The copying of an older manuscript into minuscule therefore entailed the introduction of word division, accents, and breathings, and that in turn forced ninth-century scholars to think hard about how and where these should be applied. The decisions they made in these respects, like the minuscule script itself, were adopted by western scholars and then by the first publishers of printed books in the Renaissance. In fact many of the conventions first established by Byzantine scribes at this period are still in use today, including writing the iota in a long diphthong as iota subscript, treating enclitics as separate words (compare the space regularly left before Greek enclitic $\tau\epsilon$ with the way that its Latin counterpart *-que* is written as part of the preceding word), using different forms of the letter sigma according to where in a word it occurs, and regular use of a grave accent to mark a final syllable that would have an acute if it were not followed by another word.

Periodic efforts are made by modern publishers to reverse some of these Byzantine decisions and replace them with conventions closer to those used in antiquity, for example the use of lunate sigmas and iota adscript, but for the most part such efforts have gained little traction. The reason for the success of the Byzantine conventions is not only that they are so well established but that on the whole they are well chosen and useful to the reader: iota subscript, for example, makes it easier to identify datives, especially of first-declension words ending in alpha. Moreover the Byzantine scholars usually based their conventions on ancient scholarship where it was available to them. For example, the accentuation system they applied when first systematically accenting ancient texts was derived largely from Herodian's work on accents rather than from their own spoken usage, which no longer made any distinction between acute and circumflex accents. But where no ancient guidance existed, and where the Byzantines opted for interpretation or modification of ancient practice (as for example in the case of the grave accent), their choices were good ones, and it is usually the Byzantine practice that forms the basis of our own writing system.

Another important feature of Byzantine manuscripts is their inclusion of marginal notes. Such marginalia, known as "scholia," became popular in the late antique or early Byzantine period⁴ as a means of locating commentary close to the text it discussed. In antiquity, when a "book" was normally a papyrus roll containing text written in columns with little space between them, commentaries were normally rolls separate from the texts they commented on and relied on a system of lemmata to make it clear which

⁴ There is much debate about the precise date and process of the formation of scholiastic corpora; for recent arguments representing both sides, see McNamee 2007 and Montana 2011. For the history of the debate and further references, see Dickey 2007: 11–14.

notes referred to which portions of text. In the Byzantine period, when books were mostly large parchment or paper volumes in the shape of a modern book, wide margins were often left around the pages of literary texts for the purpose of systematically copying entries from commentaries. Since the commentaries have virtually all been lost in their original self-standing format, the scholia derived from them have tremendous importance in providing the only surviving witnesses to the scholarship of Aristarchos and other major figures of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Many of the scholia seem to have been copied by Byzantine scribes with little or no alteration; some magnificent tenth-century manuscripts contain collections of scholia made up entirely of ancient material. Other Byzantine scholars, however, digested the material derived from ancient commentaries and produced their own notes. An important early figure in this category is Arethas of Caesarea, who lived in the ninth and tenth centuries. Arethas' notes provide us both with useful information derived from ancient sources, and with insight into how a leading churchman of the ninth–tenth century read and interpreted ancient literature. Eight volumes from Arethas' personal library survive with notes in his own handwriting; the texts concerned are Euclid, Plato, Aristotle, Lucian, Aelius Aristeides, and three Christian writers. This selection is probably fairly typical for that period.⁵

The tenth century was a period of considerable scholarly activity; many of the most important manuscripts and scholia collections were copied at this time, including the earliest surviving Byzantine manuscripts of poetic texts. Of new work from this century perhaps the most important is the *Souda*, a vast literary encyclopedia with some 30,000 entries. In keeping with the awakening interest in poetry shown by the manuscript copying activity of this period, the *Souda* includes poetry as well as prose. Its compiler(s) drew on considerable amounts of lost scholarship, including a dictionary of literary biography begun by Hesychios of Miletos in the sixth century and expanded by subsequent scholars. The *Souda* is still our main source of information about lost works of ancient literature, including lists of the titles of plays attributed to each ancient playwright.⁶

In the eleventh century the chief figure is Michael Psellos, whose most important works were in other areas but who also produced scholarship on classical literature, both poetry and prose.⁷ From this point onwards Byzantine scholarship became increasingly specialized, with most works focusing on specific ancient texts rather than providing the kind of

⁵ For Arethas and texts of some of his scholia see Greene 1938; Kougeas 1985; Manfredini 1975; Wilson 1983: 120–135.

⁶ For the *Souda* see Adler 1931; Theodoridis 1988 and 1993; Zecchini 1999.

⁷ For the scholarly activities of Psellos and members of his circle see Wilson 1983: 148–179.

comprehensive coverage seen in the *Souda*. More detailed discussion is therefore reserved for the following sections, and only an introduction to the major figures of the period is provided here.

Gregory of Corinth lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and wrote on rhetoric, stylistics, and dialectology; his work on the last of these topics is of particular importance today (see also below). He was followed by the twelfth-century Tzetzes brothers, John and Isaac; the elder brother, Isaac, died young and therefore the vast majority of Tzetzes scholarship was produced by John, a prolific writer who claimed to have written about sixty books (unless otherwise noted, “Tzetzes” refers to him). Most of his works are commentaries on ancient literature, and these often survive as scholia rather than as independent works; among the works commented on, poetry predominates over prose, marking a significant shift from the early Byzantine period, and allegorical interpretation is heavily deployed.⁸ Another twelfth-century commentator who preferred poetry was Eustathios, archbishop of Thessalonike, whose most famous scholarship concerns Homer (see also below).

Classical scholarship suffered severely from the sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, for libraries were destroyed and scholars dispersed. Some manuscripts looted from Constantinople were brought to western Europe and played an important role in introducing Greek literature and Byzantine scholarship to the west, so in some respects the events of 1204 played a positive role in the propagation of scholarship. But because the most important role of the Byzantines in this process had always been transmission rather than creation, this positive aspect to 1204 is greatly overshadowed by the permanent loss of ancient literary works resulting from the outright destruction of many manuscripts. It is customary to blame that destruction entirely on the Crusaders, and in one sense that blame is of course justified. In another sense, however, it is worth remembering that the only works of ancient literature to actually disappear in 1204 were ones of which there were very few copies to begin with; the Byzantine world was in no danger of losing the *Iliad*, for example, as a result of the sack. The works lost in 1204 therefore still reflect the way that the conscious choices of Byzantine scribes have shaped our corpus of Greek literature: the works of Kallimachos might have survived if the Crusaders had been better disciplined, but they would also have survived if Byzantine scribes had found them interesting enough to make more copies.

Scholarship took some time to recover from the destruction of 1204 and the exile that followed, but by the end of the thirteenth century it was once again in full bloom. The first major scholar of this “Palaiologan revival” was Maximos Planoudes, who worked on a wide range of poetic texts (see

⁸ For a list of Tzetzes’ published works see Buchwald, Hohlweg, and Prinz 1982: 814–817.

below) and also on many prose works, including Plato, Euclid, Aratos, Strabo, Diophantos, Plutarch, Ptolemy, Pausanias, and Philostratos. Planoudes was unusually ready to alter ancient texts when he found undesirable elements in them; he changed the text of Aratos to correct factual inaccuracies in the astronomy, and he removed indecent material from some poetic works, something very rarely done by Byzantine scholars. Planoudes was also notable for his knowledge of Latin literature, of which he translated a considerable amount into Greek from authors as diverse as St. Augustine, Boethius, Macrobius, Donatus, Priscian, and Ovid.

Manuel Moschopoulos was a decade younger than Planoudes and studied with him; his interests were less wide ranging and concentrated on classical Greek poetry. Most of his surviving work is elementary in nature and was designed for teaching, but he may also have engaged in more advanced scholarship. The following decade produced Thomas Magistros, whose Atticizing prose was so convincing that two of his essays were for a long time attributed to Aelius Aristides.

The last major Byzantine scholar, Demetrios Triklinios, was a scholar of a different order and has a good claim to be called the first modern textual critic. Unlike his predecessors, Triklinios learned to understand the meters of Greek tragedy and worked out that metrical clues (such as the facts that every line needs to scan and that in a chorus the strophe and antistrophe need to correspond) could be used to find and correct corruptions in the text. By applying this knowledge he made great advances in the textual criticism of the tragedians; of course, his understanding of meter was not perfect, and modern scholars like to point out the advancements since his time, but no advancement since Triklinios' day is really comparable to his idea of systematically using meter for textual criticism in the first place. It is very fortunate that autograph manuscripts of some of his work on Greek poetry survive and make it possible for us to appreciate exactly what he did – and, in many cases, how his thinking evolved, for we sometimes have a set of “proto-Triclinian” scholia from his early days in addition to the later “Triclinian” version that makes full use of his metrical discoveries. Triklinios was also modern in his awareness that readers would want to know the sources of different notes, and in his autograph manuscripts he used a special system of signs to distinguish his own ideas from material he took from older sources.

Another distinctive feature of Triklinios was his interest in poetry outside the normal canon of poetic texts. There was a strictly limited set of dramatic texts on the school curriculum (see below), and most Byzantine scholars confined their attention to those plays. Triklinios, however, made an effort to find other plays and to work on them as well; in doing so, he introduced these other plays to an audience that had previously known little or nothing about them. He also preserved for us some texts that

would otherwise have been lost, including most of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Triklinios' editions were sometimes used by Renaissance scholars in western Europe as the basis of early printed editions of Greek poetry, of course without acknowledgment; as a result, much of his work was for a long time attributed to the western scholars who used it. Only in recent decades has the identification of his autograph manuscripts allowed scholars to appreciate the full extent of Triklinios' contributions.

BYZANTINE WORK ON ANCIENT LITERATURE

In addition to the general works discussed above, Byzantine scholars produced many works dealing with particular ancient texts, and these can be particularly difficult for modern readers to handle. Many of these "works" were not ever, or are not now in their surviving forms, self-standing books appearing as separate entities with their own titles. Usually a "commentary" is simply the set of scholia found in a particular manuscript; sometimes, when we are unlucky, the scholia that can in modern terms be described as a particular scholar's "commentary" on an ancient text have been copied by a later scribe in conjunction with notes from other sources, so that the material from different commentators can be difficult or impossible to separate. Modern scholars often talk about entities like "Tzetzes' commentary on Theokritos," as about "Aristarchos' commentary on the *Iliad*," without making it clear that the work they are naming does not exist as such but can be (partially, and often uncertainly) reconstructed from marginal notes composed by others.

Dealing with scholia is always difficult, but for Byzantine scholia the difficulties are compounded by the lack of scholarly attention the scholia have received; often they are identified only for the purpose of separating them from the older scholia, which are then frequently edited without the Byzantine material. Moreover, the fact that at an early period Byzantine scholars were far more interested in prose than in poetry, while modern scholars have on the whole been more interested in poetry than prose and are particularly uninterested in some of the Roman-period prose writers on whom Byzantine scholars lavished their attentions, means that a very large amount of the existing Byzantine scholarship is ignored today.

Of the Byzantine scholarship on prose writers that has so far been given modern editions, some of the most notable materials are Arethas' scholia to Plato; the scholia to Lucian, which are based in part on the work of Arethas; the scholia and other work on Aelius Aristeides, to which Arethas was a significant contributor; the scholia to the *De materia medica* of Dioskourides Pedanios; the scholia to Plutarch; the scholia to Pausanias; the scholia to Thucydides; and the scholia to the *Anaplys Bospori* of Dionysios of Byzantion, a minor geographer of the second century CE.

There are also numerous commentaries on Hippokrates and Galen, not all of which have been published.⁹

HOMER

Despite the early Byzantine focus on prose, certain poetic works held a central place in the educational system. This position, inherited from antiquity, guaranteed not only their survival but also an important role for them in Byzantine culture. Among this group, pride of place went to Homer: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which had a vital role in the elementary school curriculum from the classical period throughout antiquity, maintained that position in the Byzantine world. Such continuity is extraordinary for several reasons. The Homeric poems are emphatically pagan, with considerable discussion of gods of whom the Christians took a dim view, and one might therefore have expected Christians to object to them as elementary school texts. Although such objections were occasionally registered, they never caused serious erosion of the continuous role Homer played in Byzantine education.

A greater problem with the Homeric poems was linguistic. Homeric language had been archaic already in the fifth century BCE, and as the centuries passed it became harder and harder for anyone, let alone children in elementary school, to understand the *Iliad* simply on the basis of being native speakers of Greek. If we did not possess school papyri from Roman Egypt, we would not believe it possible that children often learned to read their own language on a poem that had been composed more than a thousand years before they were born – but since we do have those papyri, there is no doubt of the fact. So the Byzantine world inherited not only a long-standing tradition of Homer's key place in the education system, but also a long-standing tradition of that place being maintained in the face of major linguistic obstacles. This tradition was proudly maintained throughout the Byzantine period as well, though the actual amount of Homer covered seems to have declined over time, perhaps to as little as a book and a half by the time of Moschopoulos¹⁰ – though even that amount of Homer would have posed a considerable challenge to a child born two thousand years after the *Iliad* was composed.

For both these reasons explanatory works on Homer were needed throughout the Byzantine period, and it is therefore not surprising that the Byzantines have left us a considerable amount of scholarship and other work on Homer. Some of that work adapts Homer to a Christian educational environment, for example the allegorical interpretations produced by Tzetzes and Psellos, which followed in the footsteps of earlier Homeric

⁹ For these works see Dickey 2007; Luzzato 1999; Ihm 2002. ¹⁰ Wilson 1983: 245.

allegory going back to the Hellenistic period (pagan commentators found Homer's portrayal of divinities as problematic as did their Christian successors). Most of the Byzantine work on Homer, however, concentrates on making the Homeric poems comprehensible, both on a strictly linguistic level and on a larger cultural and literary level; after all, the world of the Byzantines differed in major ways from that described by Homer. Naturally much of this work made little or no contribution to scholarship proper, and indeed most of the Byzantine scholia to the Homeric poems have not even been published.

There is, however, one major component of the Byzantine scholarship on Homer that is of importance today: the massive *Commentary on the Iliad* and *Commentary on the Odyssey* of Eustathios of Thessalonike. These are works of serious scholarship, even if the style in which they are written is neither as clear nor as concise as a modern reader might desire. Eustathios drew on an impressive range of ancient sources, many of which are now lost, and compared the readings of different manuscripts, thus preserving readings of manuscripts that have since disappeared. His commentaries, which were supposedly aimed at students and at educated general readers rather than professional scholars, are designed to be read with or without a text of Homer and include a marginal index (using a system that Eustathios apparently invented himself). We are fortunate enough to possess Eustathios' autograph manuscript of the *Iliad* commentary, so the text has not suffered from being abridged or cut up as has been the fate of so many other works of Byzantine (and, of course, earlier) scholarship.

Of lesser scholarly importance, but of considerable interest for understanding how Homer was understood and taught in the Byzantine period, are the *Epimerismi Homerici*. These are school commentaries consisting of grammatical explanations and definitions of words and following the *epimerismos* (parsing) format of the Byzantine school tradition; they are anonymously transmitted but were probably composed by Choiroboskos (see above). They include explanations drawing on a wide range of ancient sources, including some now lost, and so preserve some ancient scholarship.¹¹

DRAMA

Appreciation of dramatic texts in the Byzantine world suffered from the fact that there was no tradition of theatrical performance of such texts: they were viewed strictly as written documents. Moreover in a period of limited

¹¹ For the *Epimerismi Homerici* and Eustathios, see Van der Valk 1971–1987; Dyck 1983–1995; Kazhdan and Franklin 1984: 115–195; Wirth 1980.

knowledge of meter, their poetic power was not fully appreciated, and in some sections (particularly tragic choruses) the difficulty of the language must have posed a serious bar to comprehension. Despite these difficulties the Byzantines not only preserved a large number of tragedies and comedies, but also consistently included them in the school syllabus over many centuries.

The drama most interesting to the Byzantines was tragedy, and therefore we have considerably more tragedy than comedy surviving today. The school curriculum of the later Byzantine period included a triad of plays by each of the three main tragedians: for Aeschylus *Prometheus*, *Persae*, and *Septem*; for Sophocles *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Rex*; and for Euripides *Orestes*, *Hecuba*, and *Phoenissae*. For these plays we have not only large numbers of manuscripts, but also a significant amount of commentary, some of it faithfully copying old scholia and some of it explaining the plays for a Byzantine audience. Byzantine scholars also composed “hypotheses” or summaries of the plays, many of which survive and are included in most modern editions of tragedies.

Most of the major late Byzantine scholars worked on the tragedies. Occasionally we have their work in its original form, but most of the time it survives in the form of scholia that are mixed up in manuscripts with scholia from other sources and need to be carefully distinguished. For Aeschylus, for example, the largest group of Byzantine scholia (both in terms of the number of scholia and in terms of the length of the individual notes) is that known sometimes as the “A scholia” and sometimes as the “Φ scholia.” These exist only for the *Prometheus*, *Persae*, and *Septem* and derive from a commentary ascribed (probably falsely) to Tzetzes. They are important primarily for their preservation of material from ancient critical notes not preserved among the old scholia that have survived independently. We also have a smaller set of scholia on the same three plays that go back to the work of Thomas Magistros; these are known as the “Thoman scholia” or “B scholia.” Demetrios Triklinios produced commentary not only on the standard triad but also on the *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*. Triklinios’ notes can be distinguished with confidence because his autograph manuscript survives, but the other commentaries, as well as various notes by other Byzantine scholars, often need to be separated note by note in manuscripts, and the identification of individual notes with particular authors is sometimes uncertain.¹²

For Sophocles we have scholia (primarily on *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Rex*) from Planoudes, Moschopoulos, Thomas Magistros, Triklinios, and numerous other scholars. In some manuscripts, notes from different

¹² Smith 1975 and 1977; Massa Positano 1963; Dickey 2007: 35–38.

sources are marked to indicate their origins, so it is often possible to separate original Byzantine work from old scholia. At the same time, the Byzantine scholars made extensive use of the old scholia, which they possessed in a fuller form than we now do, and thereby preserved a significant amount of ancient material in their own commentaries.¹³

For Euripides, who was the most popular of the tragedians, we have a well-preserved commentary by Moschopoulos, a partially preserved commentary by Thomas Magistros, and two commentaries by Demetrios Triklinios. A commentary by Planoudes is largely lost but served as the basis for Moschopoulos' work. The work of Triklinios is particularly interesting, because it is possible to trace the evolution of his thinking between the two commentaries. The first is largely based on old scholia, while the second is largely original (as well as being considerably longer).¹⁴

Comedy interested the Byzantines much less than did tragedy, and as a result they failed to transmit the works of any comedian except Aristophanes. Menander's plays were enormously popular in antiquity, and therefore some of them survive on papyrus – but almost nothing of Menander's work has been preserved via the manuscript tradition. Aristophanes, on the other hand, was both copied and studied. The Byzantine school curriculum included *Frogs*, *Clouds*, and *Wealth*, and therefore copies of and scholia on those three plays are more numerous than those on other plays. In addition to preserving all the Aristophanic plays and scholia that are still extant, Byzantine scholars wrote their own commentaries on some plays. Tzetzes, Eustathios, Planoudes, Magistros, Moschopoulos, and Triklinios all worked on Aristophanes, but little survives of the work of the last three. The original scope of Tzetzes' work is uncertain, but what we now have comprises long commentaries on *Frogs*, *Clouds*, and *Wealth*, a shorter set of notes on *Birds*, and a preface to *Knights*. Tzetzes clearly had access to manuscripts with better readings than those in surviving manuscripts, as well as to old scholia that are now lost, and therefore his commentaries are still useful today. Magistros' commentaries cover only *Frogs*, *Clouds*, and *Wealth*; they are less extensive than those of Tzetzes and usually considered less important. Triklinios' commentaries are based in part on those of Magistros and in part on old scholia. They cover not only *Frogs*, *Clouds*, and *Wealth*, but also *Birds*, *Knights*, *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, and *Peace*.¹⁵

¹³ Aubreton 1949; Turyn 1949 and 1952; Longo 1971; Dickey 2007: 34–35.

¹⁴ Günther 1995; De Faveri 2002; Smith 1977.

¹⁵ For Tzetzes' work, see Massa Positano 1960; Holwerda 1960; Koster 1962; for Thomas' and Triklinios' scholia, as well as those of other scholars, see especially Koster 1957, 1964, and 1974; Chantry 1996 and 2001; Wilson 1962; Smith 1976; Eberline 1980; Jorsal, Jørgensen, and Smith 1970.

OTHER POETRY

Byzantine scholars showed considerable interest in Hesiod, resulting in the creation and transmission of a significant amount of scholia. A commentary of uncertain authorship, perhaps attributable to Choïroboskos, preserves a mass of critical material going back to the Alexandrian period; this work has been broken up and is now preserved as scholia. Later Byzantine work, which is more original, includes Tzetzes' *Exegesis of the Works and Days of Hesiod*, John Protospatharios' *Exegesis of the Days of Hesiod*, John Diakonos Galenos' *Allegories on Hesiod's Theogony*, and the long scholia that reproduce, nearly intact, lectures on the *Works and Days* by Tzetzes and commentaries on the same text by Moschopoulos and Triklinios. Work by Planoudes and Triklinios on the *Theogony* also survives, as do some scholia on the *Scutum* by Tzetzes and John Peditasimos.¹⁶

Byzantine work on Pindar includes *On Pindaric Meters*, a treatise in verse composed by Isaac Tzetzes, brother of the more famous John. There is also a substantial set of metrical scholia by Triklinios, as well as some other metrical work. Eustathios wrote a *Commentary on Pindar* that is now lost apart from its introduction; that introduction, however, is interesting, particularly for its quotations from odes that have since disappeared.¹⁷

Moschopoulos, Planoudes, John Tzetzes, and Triklinios all worked on Theokritos, but this work is today considered to have little value. One of the brothers Tzetzes (probably John, though the manuscripts attribute the work to Isaac) wrote an important commentary on the *Alexandra* of Lycophron, an abstruse Hellenistic poem on Trojan War themes. The surviving scholia to the *Batrachomyomachia* are largely by Byzantine scholars, particularly Moschopoulos. There are substantial scholia to Oppian, at least some of which come from the work of Tzetzes.¹⁸

Some of the poets in whom the Byzantine scholars were interested are now obscure. Aratos Soleus, who lived in the third century BCE, wrote an astronomical poem entitled *Phainomena*; this work receives little attention today but was popular in antiquity and remained an object of interest in the Byzantine period. In the seventh century, the engineer Leontios wrote manuals on the constructions of globes used for understanding the astronomy in the poem (*On the Construction of the Aratean Globe, On the Zodiac*), and later both Planoudes and Triklinios wrote notes on Aratos.¹⁹

¹⁶ West 1978: 69–75; Dickey 2007: 40–42. The Byzantine scholia are conveniently collected with clearly labeled attributions in Gaisford 1820, but for some groups of scholia this edition has been superseded.

¹⁷ For Byzantine work on Pindar, see Irigoin 1958; Günther 1998; Abel 1891; Budelmann 1999; Kambylis 1991a and 1991b.

¹⁸ Scheer 1908; Ludwich 1896; Wendel 1920; Dickey 2007. ¹⁹ Dell'Era 1974; Dickey 2007: 57.

Dionysios Periegetes, from the second century CE, wrote a poem describing the world; this was the subject of a lengthy *Commentary on Dionysios Periegetes* by Eustathios.

BYZANTINE WORK ON THE GREEK LANGUAGE

Byzantine scholars wrote extensively on the ancient Greek language, since they all had to learn it almost as a second language. Much of their work is of an elementary, didactic nature and therefore is of little use to modern classical scholarship, but it is of great interest for understanding the Byzantine scholars themselves and their relationship with the ancient language. In this category fall, for example, the orthographical works mentioned above, the commentaries on the *Canons* of Theodosios, and the three major Byzantine works on syntax: Michael Synkellos' extremely influential *Treatise on the Syntax of the Sentence*, Gregory of Corinth's *On the Syntax of the Sentence*, and John Glykys' *On the True System of Syntax*.

Of more significance today are the Byzantine works on ancient dialects. The major work in this category is the *On Dialects* of Gregory of Corinth, which discusses the four Greek literary dialects (Attic, Doric, Ionic, and Aeolic). The work's importance comes from its preservation of earlier scholarship that tells us how the ancient Greeks perceived their own dialect situation.²⁰ We also have a work by Moschopoulos, *On the Ionic Dialect*, which describes Ionic with special reference to Herodotos.

Also of importance today are the Byzantine *Etymologica*, a group of lexica that contain etymological as well as much other information. Ancient etymologies have no value for telling us the actual history of a word, but much of the other information in the etymologica is valuable (for example, they transmit a considerable amount of Alexandrian scholarship), and the etymologies are interesting as providing insight into how the Byzantines thought their language worked. The etymologica are mostly anonymous and are closely related to one another. The oldest surviving member of the genre, from which almost all the others descend, is the ninth-century *Etymologicum genuinum*; other significant etymologica are the eleventh-century *Etymologicum Gudianum* and the twelfth-century *Etymologicum magnum* and *Etymologicum Symeonis*.²¹

A number of non-etymological lexica are also significant. In addition to Photios' *Lexikon* mentioned above, there is a work known as the *Synagoge* or *Collection of Useful Words* that seems to date to the late eighth or early ninth century (with later additions). From the ninth or tenth century comes the

²⁰ For Gregory and the debate over his date, see Montana 1995; Donnet 1966; Kominis 1960.

²¹ For etymologica, see Cellarini 1988; Reitzenstein 1897; Schironi 2004; Dickey 2007: 91–92.

Lexikon αἰμωδεῖν (so named after its first entry), from the thirteenth century an enormous *Lexikon* misattributed to Zonaras, and from the fourteenth century Thomas Magistros' *Ekloge*, a lexicon of Attic words, and Andrew Lopadiotes' *Lexikon Vindobonense*, another Attic lexicon. Most of these works preserve fragments of ancient scholarship that is lost in its original form.²²

²² For the lexica, see Dickey 2007: 101–103; Guida 1982.

CHAPTER 5
INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGES WITH
THE ARAB WORLD

DIMITRI GUTAS, ANTHONY KALDELLIS,
AND BRIAN LONG

Scholarship on Byzantium and the Arabs traditionally focuses on military history and theological polemics against Islam.¹ In recent decades historians have shifted their focus to examine economic, religious, artistic, and also intellectual exchanges, thus puncturing the barriers of hostility between the two worlds. For scholars operating in the expansive paradigm of the “long late antiquity,” Byzantium and the Islamic world are seen as sibling offshoots and heirs of the late Roman world that only gradually went their own ways while always remaining in contact.² Nevertheless, disciplinary obstacles abide, in particular the need to learn two difficult languages that have been traditionally taught in separate academic departments, as well as the still vestigial state of Byzantine intellectual history in many of its subfields. The present chapter is an attempt to reach out across the aisle, provide a survey of important developments, and suggest a new and comparative interpretative framework for the study of intellectual debates and exchanges in different periods of Byzantine–Arab contact.

INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Whatever intellectual contacts occurred between the predominantly Greek-speaking culture of Byzantium and the Arabic-speaking Islamic world were initially built on the complex interactions that took place in late antiquity and early Islam between the Greek and Syriac traditions.³ Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic from Edessa (in northwest Mesopotamia) which, from the second century AD onwards, established itself as the primary language of Christianity in this part of the Near East and beyond. The development of Syriac into a language of literature and theology led to an increasingly integrated bilingual intellectual scene among the learned and the clergy in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire and the Mesopotamian regions of the Sasanian empire, though few individuals

Long wrote the section on Seth at the end of the chapter; the rest was written by Gutas and Kaldellis.

¹ Vasiliev 1935; Meyendorf 1964a; Khoury 1972; Thomas and Roggema 2009–2011.

² Brown 1971; Fowden 2014; for an art-historical view, see Evans and Ratliff 2012. ³ Brock 1982.

operated equally comfortably in both languages. That scene was, however, split between the two empires and deeply divided along confessional lines (between Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian, and, among the latter, Nestorian and Monophysite or Jacobite). Interactions in “real time” were almost entirely dominated by religious concerns, and the translations, which flowed largely from Greek to Syriac, focused mainly on biblical and patristic texts though some non-Christian Greek texts were also included. The translations, tethered as they were to the practical, ecclesiastical, and pedagogical concerns of Syriac communities, encompassed rhetoric and homiletics, parenetical literature, hagiography, patristic texts, medicine, and some rudiments of philosophical instruction in Aristotelian logic. Fuller engagement with the classical, pre-Christian tradition would come later, under the influence and sponsorship of the patrons of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement.⁴

Translation from Syriac into Greek was less extensive (and was mostly of hymns, hagiography, and theological polemic), so it is less easy to trace distinctively Syriac modes of thought and expression carried over into the Greek tradition.⁵ The parallel growth of Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, and Ethiopian Christianity also stimulated the creation of literatures that absorbed and adapted many elements from later Roman intellectual culture. For example, the Armenian literary and philosophical tradition was launched between the fifth and seventh centuries by men who had studied at Athens, Alexandria, and Constantinople.⁶ Again, there is less evidence for the reverse: the historian Prokopios used a *History of the Armenians*, a version of the quasi-legendary and extant *Epic Histories*, but we cannot know in what form he accessed it.⁷ We must, however, allow for a broader range of debate and exchange taking place among all these cultural zones than our meager textual record reflects. A significant factor is that intellectual exchange in such centers of learning as Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch, where members from all these zones interacted in Greek, was predominantly oral.

Just as the Byzantine and Arab courts later, the late Roman and Persian courts were informed about each other’s claims and pretensions and engaged in ceremonial, symbolic, and artistic sparring (in addition to commerce, collaborative projects, and war against each other).⁸ Yet this did not result in much state-sponsored mutual intellectual exchange in “real time.” The shahs of the Sasanian Persian dynasty (224–651) had found a way to incorporate classical Greek learning into their official

⁴ See the survey of Syriac translations in McCollum 2015, with full bibliography. For greater nuance and detail, see Hugonnard-Roche 2011 and King 2013.

⁵ Traces of Syriac influence have been detected in the *kontakia* of Romanos Melodos (sixth century), and translations include the hymns of Ephraim Syros and saints’ lives (e.g. the *Life of Sirin*).

⁶ Terian 1982. ⁷ Traina 2001. ⁸ Canepa 2009.

ideology and take credit for it in a way that excluded the Orthodox Christian Romans, the rival empire, not only politically but also culturally. The Sasanians presented themselves as the rightful heirs of the ancient Zoroastrian Achaemenids.⁹ An official book of the Zoroastrian religion, the *Denkard* IV, claims that the books containing the Zoroastrian scriptures – the *Avesta* and the *Zand* – were scattered throughout the world “by the havoc and disruption [caused by] Alexander, and by the pillage and plundering of the Macedonians,” and that they were subsequently translated into various languages, including Greek, thus bringing about classical Greek learning. The Sasanian emperors, however, starting with their founder, Ardašir I (224–241), decided to collect these texts and all other non-religious writings on science and philosophy which conformed with Zoroastrian teachings and “re-translate” them into (Middle) Persian.¹⁰ In this fashion, the philosophical and scientific writings of all cultures were seen as ultimately either derived from or conformable with the *Avesta*, and translation was the means to “repatriate” them into Persian. Thus, the shahs coopted the defeat of the great king Darius III and the defeat of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great into an imperial ideology that simultaneously glorified the Sasanian dynasty and promoted the assimilation of Hellenism through translations from Greek into Middle Persian.

The Sasanian emperor Chosroes I, during whose reign (531–579) translations from Greek into Middle Persian appear to have reached a high point, was reputed to have studied Greek literature and philosophy, including Plato and Aristotle. It is in this context that he sheltered the Athenian Platonists when Justinian’s harsh measures drove them to Persia in 529, and insisted on guaranteeing their freedom as a precondition for the peace treaty of 532; he also used Roman doctors and welcomed other philosophers from Constantinople to his court.¹¹ This culture of translation, sponsored by the Sasanian state, meant that the Sasanians interacted intellectually with ancient Greece and not with their contemporary Romans. This process continued even after the dynasty’s fall to the Arabs, and, during the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods (c. 700–850), facilitated many translations from Middle Persian into Neo-Persian and Arabic.

On the other hand, Roman interest in Persian material, whether contemporary or ancient, was limited. The historian Agathias (c. 580) was proud to have obtained, via an interpreter, a Persian version of Persian history from the archives of the Sasanian court, which he duly reproduced

⁹ Specific aspects of this putative connection are debated by historians: see Shayegan 2011.

¹⁰ Shaki 1981: 119; Gutas 1998: 34–45.

¹¹ Agathias, *Histories* 2.28–32; Prokopios, *Wars* 8.10.11–16; see Tardieu 1994; Wiesehöfer 1996: 216–221; Gutas 1998: 25–26, 40–46; Melasecchi 1996.

in his *Histories*.¹² Apart from this, the Byzantines remained profoundly ignorant of Zoroastrian thought, a religion which they regarded as generically “pagan” (and thus ironically called “Hellenism”). After the Arab conquests, intellectual activity contracted dramatically within the shrunken borders of the Byzantine empire: the great centers of learning – Alexandria, Antioch, the cities along the eastern Mediterranean coast, and Jerusalem – passed under Arab control, and the activities that continued to be conducted there in Greek, even as they would eventually attenuate over the following centuries, were now matched by an expanded engagement with classical (i.e. non-Christian) Greek learning on the Syriac side, spurred mainly by the incipient scientific tradition in Arabic, the language of the Islamic empire.

ANCIENT GREECE BETWEEN THE ARABS AND BYZANTINES

Within a century of its modest beginnings in Mecca and Medina in Arabia (622 AD), the Islamic state stretched from the Iberian peninsula to central Asia (Bactria), incorporating both the lands conquered by Alexander the Great a millennium earlier and north Africa and Spain. This vast area was governed by the clan of the Umayyads – descendants of a third cousin of the Prophet Muhammad from the Meccan tribe of Quraysh – who moved their capital to Damascus, thus placing themselves at the center of the ambient Byzantine and Hellenized Syriac and Coptic populations which vastly outnumbered the Arab tribesmen who had moved into the old urban centers of the Near East (e.g. Damascus, Jerusalem) and newly founded garrison cities of their own (Fustat – later Cairo, and Kufa and Basra in Iraq). They governed with a *laissez-faire* attitude toward local communities through local leaders, and by adopting wholesale both the administrative institutions *and* the personnel of the Byzantines at Damascus. During their relatively brief period in power (661–750) the Umayyads’ major concern was the consolidation of their rule and the expansion of its territories, while culturally they remained wedded to their pre-Islamic Arab tribal ways, adopting only the trappings of power and prestige of their new historical roles. Consonant with this concern was the gradual Arabization of the Greek and Persian state apparatus, and the beginnings of translations from Persian of texts on statecraft, political astrology, and mirrors for princes, notable among which is an Arabic version of the pseudepigraphic correspondence between Aristotle and Alexander the Great.¹³ At this stage there is little, if any, sign of direct cultural contacts with Byzantium on the other side of the border, both because the attitude of the Umayyads to the Byzantines was primarily bellicose (they attacked Constantinople *three*

¹² Cameron 1969–1970. ¹³ Gutas 1998: 25–27, and 2009.

times, in 669, 674–680, and 717), and because, more importantly, they had available among their local populations in Syria and Palestine sufficient numbers of Greek-speaking Byzantines (John of Damascus being a prime example) with whom they could interact culturally without the need to travel to Constantinople – even if such an interest existed among them. Neither did proselytization offer any means, however slight, for contact. The Umayyads were not interested in it, for two good reasons. The Qur’an expressly identifies itself as an Arabic Qur’an for the Arabs and offers no justification for its spread to non-Arabs; and non-Muslims paid an additional poll-tax to the state which would be rescinded upon conversion to Islam, thus significantly reducing state revenues.

On the other side of the border, the initial reaction of the Byzantines to the Arab conquests and the new religion was equally exclusive of any meaningful mutual contact in the cultural and intellectual spheres. The benumbed response expressed itself primarily in the production of doomsday scenarios, such as the *Apocalypse* of pseudo-Methodios, which was written originally in Syriac and then translated into Greek and other languages as it spread throughout the Christian world. While such texts responded to the Arabs, they did not constitute meaningful engagements with them. Cultural relations with the Arabs during the Umayyad period were thus glacial, and began to thaw, still minimally, only upon the accession to the caliphate of the rival Abbasid dynasty (750–1258).

The Abbasids came to power after a protracted period of preparation for a revolution that ousted the Umayyads in a civil war. The caliph al-Manṣūr (754–775) was faced with the daunting task of stabilizing the situation by discouraging opposition from the Muslim population and reconciling its various factions that had taken part in the revolution; of avoiding the causes that had given rise to dissatisfaction with the previous dynasty in the first place; of addressing the concerns of the non-Muslim subject peoples, who at that time were by far the majority of the population in the Near East (Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews, and remnants of pagans); and of legitimizing the rule of his dynasty in the eyes of all. This he did spectacularly well through a series of policies, prominent among which were the adoption of aspects of the former ideology of the Sasanians, in particular their political use of astrology and their culture of translation, as described above. Astrology, which purported to disclose the will of the stars which govern events on earth (and ultimately the will of God), revealed that the Abbasid dynasty would last for a very long cyclical period. It thus performed the political function of dissuading opposition and inducing acquiescence to its rule. But it also performed an ideological function in that it promoted the view of the Abbasids as the legitimate successors of the ancient Mesopotamian empires and of their most recent incarnation, the Sasanians, who through translations of ancient texts restored the sciences

to their rightful owners and contributed to their renewal. The Hellenized Syriac and Persian populations, who were also quite aware of their own pre-Alexandrine glories under the Assyrians and the Achaemenids, were happy to concur. This policy of cultural inclusion set in motion by the early Abbasids was intended to satisfy all the constituent groups and avoid favoritism, and had as its complement the development of a rationalist outlook in society that valued scientific and philosophical research as a cultural good. Thus al-Manṣūr's adoption of these aspects of Sasanian imperial ideology prepared the way for the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad, the new capital of the caliphate, and it did so for reasons that were endemic to developments within Islamic society and unrelated to contact with the Byzantines.

The initial translations were of astrological texts and ancillary sciences such as astronomy and mathematics. There was also need for the mathematical sciences and, in particular, of geometry in several other areas of practical use in the administration of the empire, such as surveying, irrigation, engineering, accounting, and inheritance law. Medical and related texts of manifest usefulness followed next, and eventually theoretical philosophy began to be translated into Arabic in order to provide both the foundation of the sciences and a common ground for rational discourse that would transcend otherwise irreconcilable sectarian differences.¹⁴ Arabic philosophy and science thereby constituted a dynamic revival – indeed, in the case of philosophy, a rebirth – of Hellenic thought in direct, and at times deliberate, contrast to anything going on in Byzantium,¹⁵ where they had all but expired (even more so than in the post-Roman Latin west).¹⁶

As an intellectual movement, the Arabic philosophical and scientific tradition engaged with classical Greek thought and not with contemporary Byzantine thought in real time, as had the Persians in the Sasanian empire (discussed above). Hellenism as the scientific tradition thus survived and was revived, paradoxically, among non-Greek-speaking peoples, including the non-Chalcedonian Syriac-speakers of the eastern churches, while the Chalcedonian Romans of Byzantium, by largely renouncing its philosophical principles, added cultural isolation to their political isolation in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. One result of the shedding, even abjuration, of the Hellenic identity by these Romans was that the peoples who in the meantime had embraced classical Greek learning through translations, such as the Sasanians and the Arabs, could now lay rightful claim to it. The ninth-century Arab essayist al-Jāhīz stressed that the Byzantines were Romans and not Greeks. The Greeks were

¹⁴ Gutas 1998: 107–120. ¹⁵ *Ibid.* 83–95.

¹⁶ The rebirth of philosophy in Arabic is discussed in Gutas 2004 and 2010.

individuals of one nation; they have perished but the traces of their minds live on: they are the Greeks. Their religion was different from the religion of the Romans, and their culture was different from the culture of the Romans. They were scientists, while these people [the Romans, i.e. the Byzantines] are artisans who appropriated the books of the Greeks on account of geographical proximity . . . [claiming] that the Greeks were but one of the Roman tribes.¹⁷

It is difficult to gauge whether he was responding to claims made on the Byzantine side (and what those claims looked like), or echoing a sentiment expressed by Greek-speakers within the Islamic world which he had heard. The Arabs, including al-Jāhīz, had a positive view of some Byzantine skills, but this was generally limited to their production of arts and crafts, not ideas.¹⁸ But it is the Byzantine perception that will hold our attention, particularly as this issue raises the question of the sense of identity of the Byzantines throughout the centuries, Romans versus Hellenes.

From the seventh to the tenth century, the border between Romanía and the Arab world ran roughly along the Tauros mountains; in the late tenth century it expanded in the Byzantines' favor into Syria and northern Mesopotamia but in the late eleventh century most of Asia Minor was occupied by Turkish tribes whose nominal Seljuk masters had invaded Iraq and put the caliphate in Baghdad under their trusteeship (1055). During these four centuries the Byzantines had many potential sources of information about what was going on in the Arab world. Armies of both sides operated beyond the borders; prisoners were taken, interrogated, and exchanged (these sometimes included learned men, such as the Hamdanid prince Abū Firās who spent some time as an honored prisoner at the court of Nikephoros II Phokas, and wrote poems on his debates there on many subjects);¹⁹ spies learned the language and customs of the enemy; ambassadors, many of whom seem to have been deliberately chosen to be intellectuals, shuttled between the courts taking and bringing back luxury gifts, including books; monastic travelers and merchants created networks that crossed state boundaries; the caliphate's subjects in the former Roman lands were majority Christian until quite late; and there was a diplomatically protected Muslim minority in Constantinople, with mosques.²⁰ There was a special guild in the city that dealt with imports from Syria and was in contact with Syrian merchants resident in Constantinople.²¹ These points of contact could and did serve as conduits of information and exchange, though the Byzantines rarely discussed them

¹⁷ Gutas 1998: 84–95, here 87. ¹⁸ El Cheikh 2004: 100–III. ¹⁹ Abū Firās, *Les Byzantines*.

²⁰ Kaldellis 2013a: 26–33. For exchanges in general, see Bosworth 1996: XIII, 17–23; Ducellier 1996: 203–216; Sypiański 2013.

²¹ Leo VI, *Book of the Eparch* 5.2.

in that way. Let us briefly survey a few instances of appropriation that appear as such in the sources.

In 829 the scholar and future patriarch John Grammatikos went on an embassy to Baghdad bearing luxury gifts to impress the caliphal court. When he returned, it is said that he persuaded the emperor Theophilos to emulate the Saracen palaces he had seen; the result is believed to have been the “Abbasid-style” Bryas palace.²² Theophilos’ reign was marked by diplomatic exchanges of gifts, including manuscripts, and the use of Sasanian-Islamic motifs of the hunt in textile decoration. This has been interpreted as rivalry and “an attempt to reclaim an antique past to which the Arab world was itself actively laying claim.”²³ On the Arab side, the culture of royal gift exchange was explicitly discussed in the eleventh-century *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, including exchanges with Byzantium, but we have no Byzantine counterpart for this collection.²⁴

Turning from art to religion, some Byzantine defenders of icons polemically accused the emperor Leo III (717–741) and the Iconoclasts of having been influenced by Islam (or Judaism), a possibility that has been much debated by modern scholars. But what the Iconoclasts were proposing, when examined closely, does not align well with Islamic beliefs and practices or with a contemporary movement of Palestinian Christian “iconoclasm.”²⁵ Islamic influence on Orthodoxy is virtually impossible to document, and the Byzantine intellectual and theological scene remained resolutely closed and hostile to Islam until the fifteenth century. The Qur’an was translated fairly early into Greek, and considerable fragments of it are preserved in a refutation of it by one Niketas in the ninth century. Following this, a string of refutations of Islam was produced during the middle period whose main arguments (mainly scriptural-exegetical, moral, and doctrinal) were thereafter recycled and expanded down to the end of the empire, oblivious to historical change. This body of writing has received extensive scholarly attention, as interfaith polemic.²⁶ Special mention must be made of an attempted Neoplatonic refutation of Islam by the twelfth-century thinker Eustratios of Nicaea.²⁷

Turning from religion to military theory, it has been argued that in his *Taktika* (c. 900) the emperor Leo VI meant to copy certain Muslim practices relating to recruitment and morale. He professes to loathe the

²² *Theophanes Continuatus* 95–99; see Ricci 1998: 132; Magdalino 1998.

²³ Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 405, with references; Walker 2012: 21.

²⁴ On gift exchanges, see Grabar 1997; Cutler 2008; Walker 2012: ch. 3. On the Islamic side, see Rosenthal 1964, and “Hiba” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², v. 3, 342–350.

²⁵ The evidence is presented in Brubaker and Haldon 2011.

²⁶ E.g. Meyendorf 1964a; Khoury 1972; Ducellier 1996: 146–166. The main sources for the middle period are Gleit and Khoury 1995; Förstel 2000; 2009. For translations and polemics against the Qur’an, see Simelides 2011: 892–893.

²⁷ Trizio 2012b.

Saracens, of course, but seems to hint that there is something to be learned there.²⁸ (Interestingly, a fourteenth-century Arab treatise quotes what seems to be an earlier Arabic translation of the *Taktika*.)²⁹ Like Byzantine military thought, historiography also operated mostly within fixed Greek, Roman, and Christian parameters and its horizons rarely extended beyond the imperial borders (or sometimes even beyond the capital), but eastern materials were occasionally absorbed. Theophanes the Confessor (813) was exceptional in including events in the caliphate. Some scholars believe that he drew most of this material from a redacted and extended version of the Syriac chronicle of Theophilos of Edessa, which reached to the 750s, whereas others deem it possible that Theophanes' eastern sources were more diverse, including Greek Palestinian and direct Arabic-to-Greek transmission. Apart from his chronicle, chapters from Theophilos' astrological treatise on military forecasts made it (in translation) into a ninth-century Byzantine compendium.³⁰ But after Theophanes this more "ecumenical" outlook vanished from Byzantine historiography.³¹ It would not appear again until the historian of the fall of the empire, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who based part of his work on Turkish traditions (though his narrative models were Herodotos and Thucydides).³²

Turning to the philosophical, scientific, and "occult" disciplines, here intellectual exchanges are easier to document when we have translations or acknowledgments of an "eastern" debt (though, as we will see, the exact source was often disguised). Little is known, however, about the circulation of intellectuals themselves, and the few reports that we have seem to have been written for domestic consumption with a view to serve local ideological purposes rather than to record historical events. On the Byzantine side, for example, we have the story, told in *Theophanes Continuatus*, of a student of Leo the Philosopher or Mathematician who was captured by the caliph al-Ma'mūn (reigned 813–833) in one of the latter's campaigns. The student impressed the caliph with his knowledge of geometry which, he said, he had acquired from Leo, and al-Ma'mūn, dazzled by Leo's mathematical proficiency (which Leo had gained, the story goes, on the Aegean island of Andros, of all places!), sought to recruit him to his service in Baghdad. The Byzantine emperor made a counter-offer to keep Leo in Constantinople, which included a teaching post with salary. Now, al-Ma'mūn, who had at his court mathematicians of the caliber of al-Khwārizmī and Ibn Turk who revolutionized mathematics, certainly had no need of Leo's mathematical expertise from Andros. The story was meant to encourage the Byzantine court to pay more attention to intellectuals

²⁸ Dagron 1983; cf. Nicolle 1991. ²⁹ Serikoff 2003.

³⁰ Hoyland 2011 (7 for the forecast manual); but cf. Conterno 2014. ³¹ Mango 1988–1989.

³² Kaldellis 2014b.

by suggesting that they were a valuable asset in the competition over prestige with the caliphs.³³ The myth does, however, tacitly reveal the degree to which the Byzantines were aware of Arab scientific superiority and their propagandistic attempt at one-upmanship.³⁴ A slightly more reliable story comes from the early tenth century: Nicholas, a Byzantine tax-collector, fled to Baghdad and converted to Islam, ostensibly to practice astrology more freely. In 913, during the revolt of Constantine Doukas, he sent a secret message to the *logothetes tou dromou* Thomas at the court, couched as an astrological message in Arabic.³⁵

On the Arab side, there is an equally fabricated report about the great philosopher Fārābī (d. 950/1), who is alleged in his youth to have “traveled to the land of the Greeks and stayed in their land for eight years until he completed [the study of the] science[s] and learned the entire philosophic syllabus.” Fārābī, of course, never learned any Greek (we have absolutely no evidence that any Muslim philosopher ever did), as is otherwise obvious from his works, which follow the available Arabic translations, mistakes and all, and the false etymologies of Greek words that he offers on occasion. This report in Arabic appears in the biographies of Fārābī and is another instance of the legend of the polyglot philosopher, aiming to extol his uncanny talent for languages, of which he was alleged to have known seventy; and, according to this legend, given his expertise in the (ancient) Greek syllabus, it would have been inconceivable for him not to have known Greek.³⁶

Beyond such reports intended for rhetorical effect and domestic consumption in their respective societies, intellectual exchanges in real time on a scale and of an import that would appear in the written record were few to non-existent, as mentioned, during the Umayyad period (661–750), and few during the early Abbasid era until the eleventh century. The interest of the Arabs in the latter period was concentrated almost exclusively in classical science and learning, and once the translation movement came to a gradual end, as the advances in Arabic science and philosophy went beyond the level of the translated material, that too eventually waned. The Christian communities within the Islamic domains, and especially those in the border areas, maintained cultural contacts with their coreligionists in Byzantium, and as the Greek language attenuated among them they too engaged in the translation into Arabic of Christian Greek sources, notably, but not only, in Antioch during the century when that city was again under Byzantine control (969–1084).³⁷ But such exchanges, being

³³ Sypiański 2013: 472. ³⁴ *Theophanes Continuatus* 185–192; see Gutas 1998: 180.

³⁵ *Theophanes Continuatus* 383–384; cf. Magdalino 2006a: 81–82.

³⁶ Gutas 1999: note 47; 1983: 251–252. For Fārābī’s biography see Gutas in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.n.

³⁷ Treiger 2015a, with full bibliography.

necessarily sectarian in nature, did not percolate into the mainstream in Islamic societies.

By contrast, the increasing Hellenization of high culture and learning in the Near East, first through Syriac translation and then, most emphatically, in Arabic, was among the major factors that led, after the cultural reorientations in Byzantium during the ninth century, to the engagement in real time by Byzantine scholars with Arabic learning. Glimmers of an awareness of Arab intellectual advances sometimes make it past the general silence of the sources. Whereas Psellos himself boasted that he was sought after by students from “Babylon,” another work of his records a diatribe by his western student John Italos on how much more advanced contemporary Arabs (“Assyrians”) were when it came to understanding ancient Greek wisdom.³⁸ This dates probably to the 1060s and presages the more overt importation of eastern sources in the work of the contemporary intellectual Symeon Seth (see below). The turning point after the acknowledgment by Psellos-Italos seems to have been the first decade of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), who inherited an imperial crisis of proportions unseen since the Arab conquests in the seventh century. Turkish groups had taken Asia Minor, reaching as far as the Bosphoros. To suppress some of the nearer threats Alexios had come to an understanding with the Seljuk sultan Malik-Shah in Baghdad (d. 1092) and had made deals with various Turkish chiefs in Asia Minor, whom, in typical Byzantine fashion, he would have been eager to represent at least in theory as his subordinates. This likely provides a context for Byzantine receptivity to eastern knowledge. John Skylitzes, a historian at Alexios’ court, had access to Seljuk traditions about Seljuk origins,³⁹ and it was now that the courtier Symeon Seth translated into Greek (as *Stephanites and Ichnelates*) the Arabic translation by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ of the originally Indian tale *Kalila wa-Dimna*. Alexios may have wanted to represent eastern learning as within his “domain.”⁴⁰ Acquiring knowledge “was a source of power and dominance to its possessor . . . a deliberate and on occasion aggressive act of acquisition.”⁴¹

This new engagement with the Arab world took the form of translations into Greek.⁴² These translation activities lasted well into the fourteenth century and appear, provisionally at least, to have traversed several stages. They were initially from Arabic, but in later centuries also from Persian. To these must be added translations from Latin, this time brought about by the calamitous Fourth Crusade and Venetian occupation of Constantinople in 1204.⁴³ The first overt acknowledgment that the Latins too had been gaining intellectual ground and the Byzantines falling

³⁸ Kaldellis 2007: 220–221. ³⁹ Beihammer 2012: 501–502. ⁴⁰ Cf. Kinoshita 2008.

⁴¹ Gutas 2015: 326. ⁴² Gutas 1998: 175–186. ⁴³ Listed by Demetracopoulos 2010.

behind seems to come from the emperor-in-exile at Nicaea, Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258),⁴⁴ almost two centuries after Italos' nod to the Arabs. These translations constitute a milestone in Greek intellectual history insofar as they signal the first significant influx through translation of non-Greek thought since the beginnings of the classical tradition. Herodotos had Near Eastern and Egyptian sources but likely no translated books to draw from (at least none that survived his generation), while Manetho and Berossos, writing at the beginning of the Hellenistic era, drew upon Egyptian and Babylonian sources, respectively, but wrote in Greek (and even so they appear not to have been read by Greek intellectuals before Christianity). In the Christian era, if we exclude the Aramaic background of such cultic material as the Gospels and presumably some Hermetic texts, we have little else by way of translations than Syriac saints' lives and the Persian sources of Agathias, mentioned above, which he had translated for the purposes of his history (but this was not a Persian history book that circulated independently). Therefore, this momentous development in the history of the Greek intellectual tradition, which accelerated in the later eleventh century and made it a net importer of scientific and philosophical thought – something which it used to export before it was extinguished in the sixth century – is a crucial moment in Byzantine intellectual history, though it has been relatively little studied in its philological details and even less in its significance.

The translations from Arabic covered primarily practical subjects.⁴⁵ Pride of place is taken by astrology, which appears to be among the first sciences to be translated along with its ancilla, astronomy, followed by health sciences – mostly rudimentary texts and prescriptions in medicine, pharmacology, and hippiatry – and then by translations of sciences that we call “occult”: dream interpretation, geomancy, alchemy, and magic. We have little information in Byzantine sources about the sponsors, patrons, and consumers of these translations, and even less, if any, discussion about them. It appears that the translations were done surreptitiously – clandestinely almost, as if those responsible for both producing and consuming them were ashamed to admit it, for admitting it would have acknowledged the superiority not only of Arab-Islamic culture but especially of its classical Hellenic sources. Both Islam and philosophical Hellenism, the abjured past of the Byzantines, posed profound ideological challenges to Byzantine Orthodoxy. This is also apparent in the selection of materials to be translated: practical sciences, whether medical or “occult,” whose purpose was to provide individuals with some measure of control over their personal and future state and the world around them. By contrast, the theoretical sciences, namely the physics

⁴⁴ Kaldellis 2007: 375.

⁴⁵ Gutas (2012) offers a provisional list of the known translations into Greek.

(including medical theory), mathematics, and especially metaphysics of the Hellenes as developed by the great Islamic thinkers, which provided the foundation for these practical sciences and their rational justification, were not translated. Maximos Planoudes (d. c. 1305) wrote a brief treatise on “Indian digits,” i.e. what we call Arabic numerals, and late Byzantine mathematics and astronomy were stimulated by eastern developments in the field.⁴⁶ But we first hear the names of such thinkers as Avicenna and Averroes, who revolutionized Latin philosophy and theology, only when they are quoted in the Greek translations of the works of the Latin schoolmen in the fourteenth century and beyond.⁴⁷ Absent the theoretical underpinnings of the translated texts, they were material without life and soul, with no prospects to stimulate native intellectual developments.

This attitude of the Byzantines toward the Hellenic tradition of scientific and philosophical thinking becomes even more striking when compared to that of their contemporary (Arabic-writing) Muslims and (Latin-writing) Christians. They both celebrated the Hellenes (and the Latins, conspicuously, both the Hellenes *and* the Arabs) as their masters in the sciences and proclaimed themselves proud to be their followers and to have learned from them, while frequently polemicizing against their closed-minded and reactionary compatriots who would oppose them. Some Byzantine thinkers exhibited similar stances in their philosophical investigations, such as Psellos, Italos, and Eustratios of Nicaea, but Byzantine intellectual culture as a whole seems to have painted itself into the following cul-de-sac: by being Greek-speaking, the Byzantines laid claim to the classical tradition and thus felt superior to and in no need to learn anything from the Muslim “barbarians”; consonant with this claim they dutifully copied and preserved the ancient texts (to the extent that they did – thousands perished because they ceased to be copied); but they generally refused to take seriously the ontological and philosophical commitments of the very texts they copied because these texts represented the hated Hellenic learning that conflicted on too many points with Christian doctrine. The Arabic texts, however, also presented useful knowledge which they wanted and which they could also derive from the classical texts but did not want to for the reason just stated. They thus translated the Arabic texts selectively and minimally for practical purposes, but also clandestinely, without celebrating or even drawing attention to the fact, because doing so would again acknowledge to themselves the unwanted fact that the “barbarians,” and by extension the hated Hellenes, were

⁴⁶ Planoudes, *Ψηφοφορία κατ’ Ἰνδοῦς ἢ λεγομένη μεγάλη*. Astronomy: see Chapter 11.

⁴⁷ Exceptionally we have the name of Avicenna (Ebni Sina) attached to the Greek translation of a small treatise on urine of doubtful authenticity (Gutas 2012: 253), but no translations of any of his major medical or philosophical works.

superior to them. This attitude of “cultural suicide” (Speck 1998), or schizophrenia (Gutas 2012), is a major and prevalent – indeed defining – characteristic of Byzantine intellectual history and in theory should help us understand different facets of it. It is also the elephant in the room that no one talks about.

SYMEON SETH

The scope of Arabic influence on Byzantine thought is becoming clearer, but it remains difficult to gauge whether it was welcomed with open arms or treated with suspicion. Problems with the sources compound these interpretative problems. For example, manuscripts from the crucial eleventh and twelfth centuries are scanty, and many of the texts betraying Arabic influence in that period are found in later manuscripts. In the figure of Symeon Seth, we can observe with more clarity than usual how one eleventh-century figure anticipated and reacted to contemporary attitudes toward Arabic learning. Seriously engaging with foreign knowledge appears to have been a novel, uncertain pursuit, and Seth’s works display a self-conscious tension between wanting to draw attention to that knowledge and deferring to his audience’s preconceptions.

Seth was active in a range of fields, including medicine. His treatise on dietary substances, dedicated to the emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), drew extensively on both Greek and Arabic dietary and pharmacological traditions. His *Refutation of Galen* is a short work that demonstrates the folly of an overreliance on Galen by drawing attention to inconsistencies and problems in his texts. It promises a large-scale critique, but focuses on the *De naturalibus facultatibus*.⁴⁸ A few other opuscula circulated under Seth’s name, but have received little attention, including, for example, a work on the senses.⁴⁹ To these can likely be added an eleventh-century Greek work entitled *On Pestilence (Peri loimikes)*, translated from a work on smallpox and measles by the Islamic physician and philosopher Abū-Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyā al-Rāzī (the medieval Rhazes).⁵⁰ Seth also composed two treatises on natural philosophy, both apparently for Michael VII. The first, the *Synopsis of Physics* (sometimes referred to by its Latin title, *Conspectus rerum naturalium*), is a handbook of natural philosophy. Pitched at a rudimentary level, the work is broadly Aristotelian but betrays a wide range of influences.⁵¹ His work *On the Utility of the Heavenly Bodies (De utilitate corporum caelestium)* is also concerned with the basics of natural philosophy, but seeks to demonstrate

⁴⁸ For edition, translation, and commentary, see Bouras-Vallianatos 2015.

⁴⁹ Ed. Ideler 1842: v. 2, 283–285. ⁵⁰ For authorship, see Congourdeau 1996.

⁵¹ Ed. Delatte 1927: 17–89; discussion in Arabatzis 2006.

specifically the providential arrangement of the heavens.⁵² Scholars have sought to link several other works of eleventh-century astronomy and astrology to him.⁵³ Finally, Seth translated the Arabic translation by Ibn al-Muqaffa' of the beast fables known as *Kalila wa-Dimna* under the title *Stephanites and Ichnelates*, which demonstrates that he also had a literary side. A recent study of the work emphasizes the skill with which he balanced the exigencies of careful translation against the cultural and literary sensibilities of his audience.⁵⁴

These works contain the majority of our information about Seth's life, while their manuscripts refer to him in a way that suggests that he was originally from Antioch.⁵⁵ He was also apparently well traveled in the eastern Mediterranean: beyond Antioch and Constantinople, references scattered through his works indicate that he spent time in Egypt.⁵⁶ We can date his life and activity to the second half of the eleventh century, when he seems to have had access to the court. His treatise on foods was dedicated to Michael VII, while his translation of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* from Arabic was done at the request (*prostaxis*) of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). His *Synopsis of Physics* was also most likely dedicated to Michael VII, though the manuscript evidence is not unequivocal. It is unclear whether Symeon held office or whether the titles attached to his name in manuscripts are honorifics or later accretions.⁵⁷ Scholars have attempted to identify other courtiers and functionaries named Seth with Symeon, with varying degrees of success.⁵⁸ This proliferation of Seths suggests that further attention could be given to the name itself, which is unusual, and often seems to be attached to figures with interests in the occult or astrology (the biblical Seth was thought of, after all, as the inventor of astrology).⁵⁹

Seth's career raises the prospect of his association with other prominent courtiers and intellectuals, Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates in particular, all of whom were interested in the rational explanation of natural phenomena.⁶⁰ It seems likely that Attaleiates and Seth were

⁵² Ed. Delatte 1927: 91–127.

⁵³ Pingree (1964: 138 and n. 27) suggested that Seth wrote the scholion on Ptolemy's *Almagest* dating to 1032, which Mogenet (1976: 49 n. 20) contended was difficult to prove. Magdalino (2002) argues that the fragmentary text attributed to "the late Seth" (τοῦ Σηθ ἐκείνου) is by Symeon, and suggests that Seth was a practicing astrologer, though he concealed this in his public works.

⁵⁴ Condylis-Bassoukos 1997. ⁵⁵ Sjöberg 1962: 96.

⁵⁶ The dietary treatise refers to Egyptian foods and practices, and the *Synopsis of Physics* 49 mentions an eclipse that took place "during the reign of Komnenos" that was total in Constantinople but that he had himself seen to be partial in Egypt. This eclipse was long believed to date to 1058 and the *Synopsis* believed to be among a set of rudimentary treatises dedicated to Michael VII: Magdalino 2002: 48 and *passim*. Tihon (2009: 396 n. 44), however, notes that the facts of the eclipse better fit one that took place in 1086.

⁵⁷ For Symeon's titles, see Sjöberg 1962: 91 ff.

⁵⁸ Discussion of these suggestions by Magdalino 2003b.

⁵⁹ For the name as a family name, see Sjöberg 1962: 90–91. ⁶⁰ Krallis 2012: 31 and *passim*.

acquainted; both were present at the court of Michael VII, and both owned property at Raideustos. Furthermore, several of Seth's religious manuscripts passed to Attaleiates' monastic foundation after the death of both men.⁶¹ Clear connections are harder to draw between Seth and Psellos. They used the same sources, such as pseudo-Plutarch's *Placita philosophorum*, which Seth critiqued and Psellos used in his *De omnifaria doctrina*; and Proklos, whom Psellos knew well and Seth discusses briefly in his *Synopsis*. But the two men seem to have come to differing philosophical conclusions, and there are no real connections between their medical works.⁶² It has also been proposed that, despite the silence about astrology in his works, Seth served at the court as an astrologer and is to be identified with the astrologer Seth who appears in the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene.⁶³ The possibility is intriguing, and Symeon was certainly evasive about his knowledge of sensitive subjects, but his other works do not evince any great mastery of the science of the stars. For example, the only hint that he knew Arabic astronomy (in works with certain attribution) is a discussion of the equinoctial precession of the fixed stars found in both the *Synopsis* and *On the Utility of the Heavenly Bodies*.

Finally, the medical content of his works raises the question of whether Seth practiced medicine. Was he a natural philosopher with a keen interest in medicine or a medical practitioner with a textual, natural-philosophical approach to medicine? On the one hand, his works evince a thorough grounding in the medical literature. His dietary treatise is an adroit synthesis of a large number of *texts*: unlike other medical authors, for example, Seth does not personally endorse the efficacy of particular substances. Similarly, his *Refutation of Galen* critiques Galen as being inconsistent from one text to another, not as being out of step with clinical evidence. On the other hand, he seems to betray affinities with Byzantine medical practice.⁶⁴ He shares its pragmatic, undogmatic attitude to the medical tradition, and he preferred terms in common use rather than the language of ancient medical writers (in contrast to Psellos, for example).

Given his work as a translator and adapter of Arabic materials, there is a tendency to see him exclusively in terms of his knowledge of the Arabic tradition, as the "great orientalist of Byzantine medicine."⁶⁵ There can be little doubt that he was well versed in Arabic medicine: for example, he made substantial use of the works of al-Rāzī for data about different substances in his dietary treatise, but he also seems to have had an appreciation for what was novel in al-Rāzī's works. His (likely) translation

⁶¹ Magdalino 2003b: 21.

⁶² For Seth's critique of Plutarch, see Delatte 1927: §1, p. 17; and §§36–37 for his endorsement of Proklos' theory of the elemental composition of the heavenly bodies; discussion of the *Conspectus* in Arabatzis 2006.

⁶³ Magdalino 2003b. ⁶⁴ Miller 1997. ⁶⁵ Temkin 1962: 109.

of al-Rāzī's treatise on smallpox may derive from an appreciation of the importance of al-Rāzī's distinction between smallpox and measles. His critical approach to Greek authorities may also depend on al-Rāzī, whose critique of Galen likely inspired his own. Focusing on his use of Arabic sources, however, unduly downplays his command of the Greek tradition; his treatises on natural philosophy, for example, betray wide reading in Greek texts as well. Seth appears to have drawn upon both traditions with ease. This finds clear expression in his dietary treatise: the work contains extensive passages from Greek sources, but also includes a substantial amount of information from Arabic authors.

At the same time, this dietary treatise displays a disparity in Seth's treatment of these Arabic and Greek sources. His inclusion of Arabic information implies a belief that they convey worthwhile information, but he seems uncertain, or ambivalent, about their place amid existing Greek authorities. On the one hand, the preface of the dietary treatise makes a plea for the value of non-Greek learning: it is not only the Hellenes, he claims, who have written learned things on dietary substances, but also the Persians, Hagarenes (Muslims), and Indians.⁶⁶ The disjunction implies a sense of discontinuity, that learned foreigners were not seen as simply transmitting or continuing the project of ancient Greek medicine, as they were understood in the *translatio studii* of the Latin west, but that they had something new to say.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Seth appears to prefer the Arabic tradition when it disagrees with Greek sources. His entry on pistachios, for example, contrasts Galen's findings with the "moderns."⁶⁸ More substantially, the work's classification of drugs by degrees (graded within four degrees as warm, cold, moist, or dry) shows a preference for the findings of Arabic authors.⁶⁹ Beyond the preface of the work, however, Seth's openness about foreign sources dissipates. The Hagarenes mentioned in the preface never reappear, and the only overt mention of Arabs occurs in an early discussion of the consumption of cannabis. By contrast, Seth is willing to discuss Indian dietary information (which he had gleaned, in fact, from Arabic sources).⁷⁰ It seems that in his dietary treatise, then, Seth wanted to

⁶⁶ Interestingly, figures from the Islamic world are sometimes referred to as Indians. The translation of a work on urines attributed to Avicenna refers to him as "the wisest of the Indians": Ideler 1842: v. 2, 286–302.

⁶⁷ For the *translatio studii*, see Gilson 1930; Gassman 1973.

⁶⁸ These moderns are referred to four times in the dietary treatise; as Magdalino (2003b: 19) has suggested, this may be a coded way of referring to Arabic sources.

⁶⁹ To use the preliminary findings of Harig 1967, in the 92 cases where Symeon provides a degree designation for a substance, he follows Greek authorities 31 times, but appears to follow Arabic ones in 46 cases. In 15 of these 46 cases, Harig's sources (Ibn Rushd and Ibn al-Baitār) postdate Seth, but the information may have been present in his immediate source.

⁷⁰ The information attributed to Indians in his entry on garlic, for example, seems to go back to al-Rāzī's: cf. Seth, *Syntagma* 102, with al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*, v. 7, 2981.

make his access to novel foreign sources known, but also to conceal the degree to which he had used them. This silence may be partly due to the Byzantine reticence about citing sources, especially post-classical and foreign, or especially Arabic ones.⁷¹ In medicine, Hippocrates and particularly Galen were cited, but later authors were used with little acknowledgment.⁷² Beyond that, religious anxiety likely underlay some of Seth's reluctance to openly make use of Arabic sources. In contrast to the Indians, for example, Arabs were infidels who posed a direct military and religious threat to Byzantium.

Seth's other works are also reticent to cite Arabic sources. For example, the likeliest inspiration for his critique of Galen was al-Rāzī's own *Kitāb al-Shukūk 'alā Jālīnūs (Aporiae on Galen)*, but Seth gives no hint of this. Similarly, the *On Pestilence* translation downplays its use of Arabic sources, insisting that an Arabic text was used only because the disease had been less prevalent in Galen's day.⁷³ The closest that he comes is a reference to "the Persian" in a discussion of duck fat, which appears to be a reference to a passage in al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-Hāwi*.⁷⁴ Several questions arise from this reticence. Most pressingly, does it derive from religious anxiety (or decorum)? Thomas Glick has suggested that it was conventional to conceal intellectual contact and exchange across religious boundaries, "to avoid the suspicion, from one's own coreligionists, of promoting tainted knowledge."⁷⁵ What were the attitudes to Arabic knowledge, then, among Seth's coreligionists? Was Seth's approach typical? How were his works received?

As discussed above, other Byzantine scholars at this time began to draw upon knowledge from the Islamic world, but it is unclear how it was received. Were these works known to a small group of specialists, but unknown or unwelcome to other educated people? This question cannot be answered at present. Nevertheless, the approach to Arabic sources in Seth's medical works appears to contrast with other disciplines. In astronomy, the reception of Arabic sources was more open. Like medicine, astronomy too had a long Greek tradition,⁷⁶ and it had in Ptolemy a central authority whose texts remained foundational in Byzantium.⁷⁷ However, the way that Byzantine scholars made room for Arabic astronomical knowledge contrasts with the approach in Seth's texts,

⁷¹ Cf. the discussion in the preceding section.

⁷² See, for example, Sonderkamp 1984: 30. Indians and Persians are openly cited in the dietary treatise; possibly they were seen as having venerable, authoritative literary traditions.

⁷³ Ed. De Goupyl 1548: 244–259; discussion in Mavroudi 2002: 421.

⁷⁴ Seth, *Syntagma* 71–72, and al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Hāwi*, v. 7, 2957. ⁷⁵ Glick 2004: 159.

⁷⁶ This is in contrast to dream interpretation, where the Greek tradition had been forgotten (Mavroudi 2002), and astrology, where it was believed to have been improved upon by Arabic findings (Magdalino 2003b: 18–19).

⁷⁷ See Chapter II.

and perhaps in medicine more broadly. Two eleventh-century astronomical texts illustrate this.

The first dates to the year 1032 or after. An extended scholion to Ptolemy's *Almagest*,⁷⁸ it compares the findings of Ptolemy (the *Almagest* and the *Handy Tables*, as well as Theon's commentary on the *Handy Tables*) with the findings of "modern" (*neoteroi*, here Arabic) astronomers, likely those around the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn. Furthermore, it uses the tables of Ibn al-A'lam in order to calculate the position of the sun. The author's preference for the findings of Arabic astronomers is clear, and this preference appears to rest on their employment of a continued program of observation (τήρησις / *teresis*). Like Seth, then, the author also believes that the more recent findings of Arab scholars have improved upon ancient Greek sources, but unlike Seth he is completely frank about this preference. What is more, this anonymous author seems to be comfortable with citing Arabic authorities by name, explicitly citing the compiler of a table of ephemerides, Ibn al-A'lam (Ἀλήμ).⁷⁹

The other text is a manual of astronomy in Par. Gr. 2425 that can be dated to c. 1072. This work, composed in Greek, may derive from a (lost) middle Byzantine astronomical translation, and relates techniques of Arabic astronomy.⁸⁰ Furthermore, some of the work's information can be traced back to the astronomical table (*zīj*) of the ninth-century mathematician and astronomer al-Khwārizmī, as conveyed in the commentary of Ibn al-Muthannā. This work attests to the high level at which astronomy was carried out in the period. The work draws on novel Arabic trigonometric methods and gives the correct latitude for Constantinople, improving on Ptolemy but also surpassing scholars from the later Palaiologan flourishing of astronomy, who continued to use Ptolemy's incorrect figure.⁸¹ This work survives in fragmentary form, without introductory material, and thus offers us more limited information than the earlier text on the reception and presentation of Arabic astronomy. Like the earlier work, however, it does seem to present Arab figures as authorities, or at least as purveyors of reliable information. It makes two explicit references to the *kanon* of Chaspas or Chaspe, which seems to be a reference to the early Islamic astronomer Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib.⁸²

These two astronomical texts suggest then that, despite their long Greek tradition, scholars of astronomy were willing to make open use of Arabic information. They candidly discussed its findings, cited Arabic scholars by name – apparently viewing them as authorities – and were willing to follow

⁷⁸ Vat. Gr. 1594 preserves this scholion, while Vat. Gr. 2326 is a thirteenth-century copy with damaged parts of the text; ed. Mogenet 1962, discussion in Mogenet 1976; Tihon 2009: 395–396.

⁷⁹ Mogenet 1962: 210. ⁸⁰ Jones 1987. ⁸¹ Tihon 2009: 397.

⁸² Jones 1987: 28a.4, 36a.3. Jones (184) notes that several other problems in the work were likely computed with Ḥabash's tables.

these sources when they contradicted or improved upon authorities of the Greek tradition. What accounts for the difference between this and Seth's medical works? In part, he may not have wanted to advertise his crossing of religious boundaries. But the contrast between medicine and astronomy suggests that some of his reluctance likely derived from the unique position of medicine in eleventh-century Byzantium. Medicine was a particular object of learned interest and physicians may have made a recent transition to social respectability.⁸³ In this context, the works of classical Greek medicine were held in high esteem, especially those of Galen, who appears to have been read widely, not solely by medical practitioners. The *Souda* notes that it was not necessary to recount Galen's doctrines or works because they were well known to everyone.⁸⁴ Similarly, the satirical *Timarion* (c. 1100) makes an apt joke about the length and prolixity of his works. Seth seems to have found this uncritical embrace of Galen problematic. In his *Refutation*, he sharply critiques those who held Galen to be divine. This veneration for Galen is likely one of the reasons why Seth was reluctant to critique Greek medical writers in favor of Arabic ones, or to openly prefer the findings of Arabic writers, even though he was frustrated by the stubborn traditionalism of his contemporaries. Drawing upon Arabic sources seems to have been a novel, uncertain gambit, and therefore he responded by being evasive. He gave his readers the benefit without causing controversy.

This evasiveness is not the entire story, however. Seth's works evince a reluctance to acknowledge the extent of their Arabic influence, but they simultaneously draw attention to their use of those novel sources. Seth's success at court and the extensive circulation of his works suggest that they were successful and culturally salient because of his knowledge of and access to foreign wisdom. To pick one example, his translation of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* was part of a broader vogue for foreign or exotic literary works that can also be seen in the *Syntipas* and *Digenes Akritas*.⁸⁵ Seth's works, therefore, do not simply conceal their Arabic influences. Rather, they simultaneously acknowledge Arabic influence and soften its threatening aspects, betraying uncertainty while simultaneously opening new pathways for others to follow.

By the Palaiologan period, attitudes on many of these issues had begun to shift. The emperor Andronikos III was attended by both Roman and "Persian" doctors.⁸⁶ Just as the Latins received much Greek learning through the Arabs, the Greeks received much Arab learning through the Latins.

⁸³ Kazhdan 1984. ⁸⁴ *Souda*, ed. Adler, v. 1, 506.

⁸⁵ Kinoshita (2008) has argued for a Mediterranean "culture of empire," where the command of foreign texts and knowledge serve as markers of imperial status.

⁸⁶ Gregoras, *Roman History* 9.9.

PART II
SCIENCES OF THE WORD

CHAPTER 6
RHETORIC AND RHETORICAL THEORY

STRATIS PAPAIOANNOU

“There has been no time in history when the formal study of rhetoric, as inaugurated in the fifth century BCE, has had such a pervasive impact on the education system and the culture of a society as in . . .” This is how a recent chapter in a companion to ancient rhetoric begins. Its author concludes this somewhat exaggerated view of the influence of rhetoric with: “the so-called Second Sophistic.”¹ A Byzantinist would perhaps retort that the right conclusion should have been “Byzantium” and, especially after the eighth century, “Constantinople.”

In a volume on the intellectual history of Byzantium, such a statement is especially pertinent. As one might argue – without risking exaggeration – almost the entire Byzantine intellectual tradition was, to one degree or another, *rhetorical*; that is, it was informed by a certain codified register, system, and method of discourse. Just as for us today “literariness” is not a sole property of “literature,” so too for the Byzantines “rhetoricity” was not an exclusive feature of strictly and narrowly defined “rhetorical” texts. No single chapter could thus possibly deal with all rhetoric within Byzantine intellectual history. Our aim here is rather to present an overview of the “codified” aspect of the definition offered above, namely to survey briefly the field of Byzantine rhetorical *theory*, that sizeable corpus of manuals, commentaries, and texts that offered training in all aspects of what the Byzantines called rhetoric.

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

A modern reader might instinctively associate rhetoric with verbose language which is usually obtuse to authentic emotion and certainly is dangerous, whether because of its insincerity or because of its outright deceptiveness. These are associations which were not alien to the

This chapter anticipates a relevant chapter that will appear in Papaioannou (forthcoming). I owe thanks to Charis Messis for several suggestions, and to Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou for their comments.

¹ Goldhill 2009: 228.

Byzantines themselves; as we shall see, the moral status of rhetoric was continuously under debate. Yet it might be better to delimit Byzantine rhetoric in the following three ways.

(a) In the narrowest sense, rhetoric indicated a profession. Throughout Byzantine history there were professional “rhetors” who often carried such official titles as *rhetor* (ῥήτωρ), *sophistes* (σοφιστής), or, after the eleventh century, *maistor ton rhetoron* (μαῖστωρ τῶν ῥητόρων). These were either expert public speakers, writers, teachers of rhetoric, or, often, all the above. For these professionals, rhetoric was the means by which they made their living, receiving salaries either through private donations or through imperial and ecclesiastical funding. Rhetoric was also the means by which they advanced in social standing, often entering the imperial or ecclesiastical administration, procuring wealth, and attracting students, admirers, and protégés.

Some of the most well-known Byzantine authors belong to this category, from Gregory of Nazianzos to Eustathios of Thessalonike, and there were many, many more, most of whose names have been lost in the ravages of history. These were the people who preserved, disseminated, and produced the manuals, commentaries, and theoretical treatises discussed below. They were also primarily the people who owned and added scholia to the numerous medieval manuscripts with ancient and late antique master-rhetors, such as Demosthenes, Aelius Aristides, and, most importantly, Gregory of Nazianzos.²

(b) Rhetoric indicated a certain style, a set of discursive practices and skills to be used in speech or composition. These covered anything from the acquisition and usage of the right, Atticizing, vocabulary (*lexis*) to categories and rules of genre (*eidos*); from syntax, the arrangement of semantic units (*synthesis*, *syntheke*), and the appropriate prose and verse rhythm (*rhythmos*, *metron*) to the joining of the right content (*ennoia*, *nous*) with the correct method (*methodos*) and rhetorical figures (*schemata*); from punctuation and cadence (*stixis*, *kola*, *anapausis*) to performance and oratorical delivery (*hypokrisis*); from narrative order (*diegesis*) to a series of virtues of style, what the Byzantines called “forms” (*ideai*), such as the two most important, clarity (*sapheneia*) and force (*deinotes*).³ These notions and related practices were elaborated in manuals, from dictionaries and

² The fate of this profession was precarious in Byzantine society, which cannot be investigated here. Telling, for instance, is the fate of the semi-official titles, such as ῥήτωρ in the period until 1204 (see Papaioannou 2013: 29–50 and 245). The title “rhetor” was reinstated in the late thirteenth century, under the patriarch Germanos III Markoutzas (1265–1266), and was conferred on Manuel/Maximos Holobolos (c. 1245–1310/14). Afterwards, references are spotty. Though the title appears in lists of ecclesiastical offices we know from manuscripts from the late period (Darrouzès 1970: 207, 281, 547, 549, 564, 571–574), we have no evidence of people who bore it, even though professional teachers and practitioners of rhetoric continued, of course, to exist.

³ See, most recently, the introductions, notes, and indices in Patillon 2008, 2009, 2012a, and 2012b.

anthologies to detailed handbooks, and taught through training for those who had access to schooling. Furthermore, these categories and skills created a certain foregrounding of language, an acute awareness, that is, of the importance of linguistic form; they also cultivated an indulgence in the potential of language for persuasion and expression.

As style or, better put, as a certain discursive habit and education, rhetoric perpetuated not simply a series of formal preoccupations. It also sustained a large stock of knowledge, an assemblage of narratives and erudition inherited from pre-Christian intellectual traditions, most notably Greek mythology, but also Athenian history. Furthermore, it promoted a relatively closed register of authorities, of masters of rhetoric, what we might term the rhetorical *canon* or what a thirteenth-century manual called “the wise ones (οἱ σοφοί / *hoi sophoi*).”⁴ This canon of “wisdom” included non-Christian authors such as Homer and Plato (a poet and a philosopher that were considered fundamental for rhetorical education), Demosthenes, Aelius Aristides, and Libanios (the three most favorite “rhetors”), and also Church Fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzos and John Chrysostom as well as Symeon Metaphrastes who, in the late tenth century, produced a popular corpus of saints’ lives for public recital conforming to better rules of style. After all, “rhetoric” was often simply that: authors or authorities whose texts must be studied diligently and recreated in innovative ways.

(c) Middle Byzantine rhetoric fused the cultural capital of Hellenism with the symbolic and ritual capital of Christianity. In this sense, rhetoric functioned ultimately as the sociolect of the middle and upper echelons of Byzantine society. It especially represented those who wished to enter the Byzantine ruling elite, hence its major importance for intellectual history. More than a profession or a discursive habit and education which facilitated careers, rhetoric also nurtured a whole glossary of metaphor and morality, a certain taste and aesthetics, indeed an ideology. By its consistent presence in defining patterns of communication, representation, and imagination, rhetoric in Byzantium was, as Simon Goldhill has eloquently remarked about the culture of Second Sophistic in the essay quoted above, “a fundamental medium for the circulation of ideas, the circulation of power, the performance of the self in the public life of the empire. From the schoolroom to the grandest political venue, rhetoric was integral to the formation and expression of elite culture.”⁵

⁴ “Whom among *the wise* should one take as example for each type of discourse (Τίνας τῶν σοφῶν παραληπτέον εἰς παράδειγμα ἐκάστου εἶδους τῶν λόγων)”: Anonymous, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech* (Hörandner 2012: 104).

⁵ Goldhill 2009: 232.

RHETORICAL THEORY: A HISTORY

It is difficult to do justice to the field of Byzantine rhetorical theory that supported the practice and reception of rhetoric, in its various facets delineated above. The pages produced by Byzantine writers in this field are of effusive abundance. What is more, these are pages that have been generally neglected. This field of Byzantine writing has attracted little attention after the valiant efforts of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century (especially German) philologists to decipher the complex tradition of rhetorical commentaries and handbooks and to produce impressive editorial work – leading among these philologists was Hugo Rabe (1867–1932), a student of Wilamowitz and Usener. The reasons behind this neglect are several. Certainly among them we should count the fact that theoretical writing about rhetoric may appear, at first glance, as too technical and, in its obscurity, marginal. There is also, however, the dominance in recent decades of a certain brand of classicism, less vigorous and less comprehensive than its nineteenth-century and pre-World War II predecessor: it has revived interest for Aristotelian rhetorical theory and its Roman epigones as well as for the late medieval theorizations of “humanist” authors like Dante, but has left the medieval Greek tradition mostly outside its purview.

Yet Byzantine rhetorical theory has much to offer to the interested reader. For the purposes of the present volume, it is important to state that, along with the study of philosophical texts, rhetorical theory was probably the most “intellectual” of disciplines in Byzantium and an influential discipline at that, even if it is difficult to chart the extent of this influence, a topic to which I will return below.

Let us put forward a map and a chronology of this field. What kinds of text did it include? There were, first of all, handbooks that detailed different aspects of rhetorical discourse and practice; these were usually of pre-Byzantine or early Byzantine date. Next come the numerous commentaries on these earlier handbooks. Commentaries took the form either of marginal scholia, sometimes arranged in the form of *catenae* (“chains” of glosses on the same passage culled from different commentators), or of independent works with lengthy introductions, appendices, summaries, and the like. Related are a long series of shorter technical treatises that deal with this or that aspect of rhetoric (e.g. rhetorical “figures,” *schemata*). Several Byzantine dictionaries are part of this field as well, to the extent that they offered models for rhetorical *lexis*. Then, there were shorter or longer texts of what we might call literary criticism, a large number of which were heavily indebted to the theoretical vocabulary of rhetorical manuals.⁶

⁶ See Chapter 7.

To these, we should append an important part of the tradition of scholia to several ancient authors who were upheld as models of rhetoric (including Homer, Plato, Demosthenes, Lucian, Philostratos, and Gregory of Nazianzos); these scholia often alert the reader to matters of rhetorical style. After all, throughout its ancient and Byzantine history, rhetorical theory and literary criticism, i.e. *prescriptive treatises* and *descriptive or explanatory practices*, were mutually enhancing and supplementing discourses, rarely separated by clearly defined boundaries, whether in school life or in manuscript culture.

By the seventh century, the canon of Byzantine rhetorical theory had been established and it remained more or less unchallenged until the fifteenth century. Two names stand out, listed in order of appearance in the curriculum: Aphthonios (fourth century) and Hermogenes (second century).⁷ Prefaced by Aphthonios' relatively brief discussion of *Preliminary Exercises* (*Προγυμνάσματα* / *Progymnasmata*), the four treatises attributed to Hermogenes – *On Issues* (*Περὶ στάσεων* / *Peri staseon*), *On Invention* (*Περὶ εὐρέσεως* / *Peri heurseos*), *On Forms* (*Περὶ ἰδεῶν* / *Peri ideon*), and *On the Method of Forcefulness* (*Περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος* / *Peri methodou deinotetos*) – became a unified corpus during the early Byzantine period and was used widely as the primary textbook. Both in critical reception and in its wide manuscript circulation, Aphthonios-Hermogenes was a near equivalent of Aristotle's *Organon* as used for the teaching of logic, which was the introductory part of the *philosophical* curriculum in the same period.

Aphthonios' *Progymnasmata* and Hermogenes' *Art of Rhetoric* (*Τέχνη ῥητορικὴ* / *Technē rhetorikē*, as the four books were called together) were the culmination of a long tradition of theory that we can trace back at least to the fourth century BCE, to Plato and Aristotle. Our knowledge of this post-Aristotelian/pre-Hermogenian tradition, and then also of early Byzantine rhetorical theory between Aphthonios in the fourth century and the new chain of commentaries that begin in the ninth century (with the important work of John of Sardeis),⁸ is full of gaps which cannot be surveyed here. Nevertheless, it is important to mention at least some seminal figures and trends that provided fundamental premises for Byzantine rhetoric.

Dionysios of Halikarnassos (first centuries BCE/CE) must be mentioned first. His work, including treatises *On the Ancient [Attic] rhetors* (*Περὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων ῥητόρων* / *Peri ton archaion rhetoron*) and the influential *On Composition* (*Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων* / *Peri syntheseos onomaton*), reflected a theoretical tradition that joined Greek with Roman discursive aesthetics (e.g., Cicero). A second important trend was the adoption of

⁷ For recent discussions and editions of these two writers see n. 3 above.

⁸ On whom, see Alpers 2009.

Hermogenes and Hermogenian aesthetics by the early Byzantine Neoplatonists, as is obvious by both Neoplatonic commentaries on Hermogenes that survive in a somewhat fragmentary state (with the exception of Syrianos' work),⁹ as well as by the jargon and preoccupations of the several fifth- and sixth-century commentaries on works of Plato and Aristotle. These mixtures of Greek with Roman traditions and, especially, of rhetorical theory with Neoplatonic philosophy shaped subsequent Byzantine rhetorical custom.

There is, furthermore, another feature of the earlier tradition that continues into the Byzantine period. From a later perspective, texts of rhetorical theory appear as well-established authoritative works in a relatively unified, almost monolithic tradition. However, all of them, with no exception – from Gorgias to Hermogenes, from Proklos to (in our period) Photios, John Tzetzes, and Maximos Planoudes – arise from what originally was a highly competitive environment of different approaches and rival schools. Unfortunately, we usually cannot reconstruct this original setting to any satisfying degree. But even in later treatments of earlier classics, criticism of authority is no rarity. Tzetzes' complaints about almost all earlier authorities are not the exception in this regard. Competition was also felt in the many lines of thought that appeared in an author of one period and yet were never picked up by any later writer. Upon a closer look, the field of rhetorical theory is full of individual voices.

How did the Byzantine tradition develop after the seventh century? In his comprehensive treatment of Byzantine rhetorical theory (still the only one available), Herbert Hunger focused on the reception of Hermogenes and Aphthonios and saw it as more or less a stable tradition.¹⁰ However, we might be able to outline a somewhat more nuanced narrative and regard middle and late Byzantine rhetorical theory as a series of creative expansions of the Aphthonian-Hermogenian canon.¹¹

The first took shape during the tenth century and consisted in the expansion of the canon to include Christian and later Byzantine authors. For several centuries before that already, the tradition of Christian rhetoric, i.e. Christian writing informed by the habits of ancient rhetoric, was substantial and dominant, but it was only during the tenth century that master Christian rhetors become part of the canon of rhetorical *theory* propagated in the context of education. Gregory of Nazianzos is the most important such rhetor. In John Sikeliotēs' outstanding commentary on Hermogenes' *On Forms*, passages from Gregory's *Orations* consistently replace examples from Demosthenes, the unquestioned Rhetor of the earlier tradition.¹² From

⁹ Rabe 1892–1893. ¹⁰ Hunger 1978: 75–91.

¹¹ These are discussed in detail, with references and bibliography, in Papaioannou 2013, especially 51–127, 246–249, and 263–265.

¹² Ed. Walz 1832–1836: v. 6, 80–504; see Conley 2003.

this point onward, Christian rhetoric features recurrently in rhetorical-theoretical writing, though never with the intensity encountered in Sikeliotēs and, to a lesser extent, Psellos. Simultaneously, also from this point onward, non-Christian rhetorical-theoretical writing consistently informs the commentaries and readings of the Christian patristic canon.¹³ A second wave of this “renewal” of the canon is evident in texts of the late thirteenth century, reflecting developments already at work in the previous two centuries. At this time, beyond early Christian rhetors, middle Byzantine rhetors too enter the canonical stage of the “wise”: for instance, Psellos and, notably, Symeon Metaphrastes, already mentioned above.¹⁴

A different kind of expansion also makes its first appearance in the second half of the tenth century but reaches fuller force in the work of Psellos a hundred years later and, beyond him, in the first half of the twelfth century. This entailed recourse to alternative theoretical models for the understanding of discursive phenomena. Without setting Aphthonios and Hermogenēs aside, teachers and students of rhetoric copied, read, and reviewed also other manuals either within the rhetorical tradition proper (most importantly, Dionysios of Halikarnassos)¹⁵ or within the philosophical tradition. In the twelfth century, two separate and impressive commentaries on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* were written, a text that had fallen virtually by the wayside since Dionysios.¹⁶

Additionally, Psellos was responsible for a unique mixture of Neoplatonic and Christian metaphysics with rhetorical-material aesthetics, arguably among the most inventive innovations in Byzantine rhetorical theory: Psellos was the first to conceive of authorship as a creation out of nothing, fusing the figure of the rhetor with that of the Christian God and Neoplatonist demiurge; simultaneously, he placed significant value on the theatrical and sensual aspects of discourse. Worthy of mention is also that, for some Byzantine rhetors and readers, Hermogenian rhetorical aesthetics provided the overarching hermeneutic tool by which to discuss *all* genres and types of discourse, including ancient poetry. Photios’ massive collection of book reviews, known as the *Bibliothēke*, and Eustathios of Thessalonike’s even more enormous *Parekbolai*, or *Commentaries on Homer*, are the two most important specimens of this kind of application of rhetorical theory to ancient literature, which continued but increased in scope the Hermogenian aspect of earlier scholastic practice.¹⁷ Related to these developments was the twelfth-century revival of dormant rhetorical

¹³ E.g. in the popular work of Basileios Elachistos (mid-tenth century); see Schmidt 2001.

¹⁴ Cf. the text cited in n. 4 above. ¹⁵ Aujac 1974.

¹⁶ The commentaries are edited in Rabe 1896; see Conley 1990; Hörandner 2007.

¹⁷ Kustas 1962 on Photios; Cullhed 2014 on Eustathios, with earlier bibliography. The presence of Hermogenian theory in the extensive philological work of the Palaiologan period has not yet been studied.

genres such as the Lucianic and Platonic dialogue as well as the ancient novel. These were types of text whose memory had been kept alive in rhetorical-theoretical manuals and associated scholastic activity.

RHETORICAL POLITICS

An ample number of texts document the concerns and issues of the Byzantine theorists of rhetoric. This was an immense field, where differences crop up in the details. Each reader could, therefore, identify a dissimilar set of impressions regarding the main topics of agreement or disagreement. Let us highlight briefly one possible set of three such main subjects – to use again a tripartite structural pattern familiar to the Byzantines in rhetorical definition.¹⁸

(a) Byzantine treatises of rhetorical theory often revisit the philosophical and political question of the disciplinary, moral, and even ontological status of rhetoric (and, by extension, the social position of the rhetors themselves). That is, Byzantine theorists repeatedly ask “whether [rhetoric] exists, what it is, for what purposes it exists, and exactly what sort of thing it is (εἰ ἔστι, τί ἔστι, διὰ τί ἔστι καὶ ὅποιόν τί ἔστιν).”¹⁹ The primary trend picks up and promotes as a kind of doctrine a line of thought which was already present in early Byzantine rhetorical thinking. Byzantine theorists, occasionally regarding rhetoric as indeed a *philosophical* discipline, asserted that the foremost aim and contribution of rhetoric are “political”: “to set in order and adorn human life and its politics (τὸ κοσμεῖν τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον καὶ τὰς πολιτείας).”²⁰ Or, to use another popular definition which summarizes a long tradition of experiments in how to describe rhetoric concisely: “rhetoric is an art (*techne*) concerned with the power of discourse in civic/political matters, whose aim is to speak persuasively according to what is possible.”²¹ Thus a “rhetor” too is “a person who studies and possesses profound knowledge of civic/political matters (πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμων / *politikon pragmaton epistemon*).”²²

This emphasis on the *political* may surprise us. We are accustomed to think of Byzantine rhetoric (and to some extent, rightly so) either as a depoliticized tool of self-promotion in a courtly and ecclesiastical culture conditioned by praise and blame, or as mere style preoccupied with ahistorical and, at that, apolitical images of spiritual order. Instead, Byzantine theoreticians insisted on the *social value* and *practical role* of

¹⁸ There are three “genres” of rhetoric, three types of “narrative,” three methods of “inventing unknown words,” etc.

¹⁹ Rabe 1931: 14.7–8. ²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.6–7. For rhetoric as part of “philosophy,” see n. 24 below.

²¹ Τέχνη περὶ λόγου δύναμιν ἐν πράγματι πολιτικῶ, τέλος ἔχουσα τὸ πιθανῶς εἰπεῖν κατὰ τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον: Schouler 1995, esp. 168–169.

²² Rabe 1931: 15.8–9.

rhetoric and thus the elevated moral as well as political function of rhetors. What underlies this insistence is a centuries-old association of rhetoric with deception, mere artistry, and the inferior realm of the senses and emotions, *aistheseis* and *pathe*. This was an association both expanded upon within the exclusive realm of philosophical discourse (from Plato onwards) and repeated again and again as “common sense,” a *topos*, within the wider field of popular discourse and, indeed, rhetorical practice itself. An influential example for the Byzantines was Gregory of Nazianzos’ recurring tirades against rhetoric and rhetors – albeit these tirades were cased in perfectly rhetorical parlance. More importantly perhaps, this association endangered the social standing and cultural cache of the rhetors themselves, reducing them to superfluous and sinister agents.

To counteract this, Byzantine theorists ingeniously invert the arguments leveled against them and their precious skill. John Sikeliotos goes so far as to suggest that rhetoric is actually the “*best part of philosophy*,” emphatically criticizing Plato in this respect. Rhetoric, Sikeliotos rejoins, is “that part of politics which contributes most to social cohesion”; it is “indeed a *science / profound knowledge (episteme)* and a divine and admirable art (*techne*) imitating that first cause [i.e. God].”²³ Similarly, but with an unmatched obsession, Psellos claims that philosophy without rhetoric or rhetoric without philosophy are imperfect, incomplete, ineffective. Several twelfth-century rhetors followed suit with even more extravagant praises of rhetoric as opposed to philosophy.²⁴

Besides these sophisticated yet also self-serving theorizations of the status of rhetoric, we should also note that Byzantine rhetorical-theoretical texts actually provided a fertile space for political theorization, though they remain under-utilized by modern students of Byzantine political philosophy. In numerous asides, we find significant reflections on different political systems, on “political science,” and on the responsibilities of the ruler and the ruling elite.²⁵

(b) The same emphasis on “politics” determines the system of *literary* discourse envisioned by Byzantine rhetorical theory. Modern historians of postclassical rhetoric remark (with an implicit dissatisfaction) that rhetoric in the imperial era was reduced primarily to the epideictic or panegyric genre, with little room for *parrhesia* or freedom of speech, the supposedly typical feature of Athenian democracy, most pronounced in judicial-forensic (*dikanikos*) or deliberative-advisory (*symbouleutikos*) speech.²⁶ It is not the place here to debate the validity of this view. What is relevant

²³ Rabe 1931: 393–397. ²⁴ Papaioannou 2012b.

²⁵ For one example out of many, see Rabe 1896: 44.6–46.20.

²⁶ Hunger 1978: 67–68; Kennedy 1994: 201.

for us is that this is a view *not* shared by Byzantine theorists of rhetoric.²⁷ For them, and in accordance with the organization of discourse propagated by Hermogenes, rhetoric is first and foremost *politikos logos*, civic/political discourse, manifested especially in the judicial and deliberative modes and their ideal exponents, Demosthenes and Gregory of Nazianzos. By contrast, panegyric discourse, which in the Hermogenian system includes philosophical dialogue (Plato, etc.), historiography (Herodotos, etc.), and epic poetry (Homer), is accorded much less space, attention, and, significantly, value. This is because Hermogenes and his Byzantine commentators regard such discourse as “mimetic,” namely performance-oriented and aiming at pleasure (*hedone*) rather than truth (*aletheia*); for this, it is regarded with distrust.

This organization of discourse prevailed in Byzantium, inflected by the Christian moralists’ conspicuous angst toward sensory and emotional discourse. It encouraged, for example, a certain aversion toward the writing of fiction. Indeed, in the period that interests us here, namely after the seventh century, the genres of rhetorical fiction (the ancient novel and the Platonic and Lucianic dialogue) receded from written production, even though they remained present in the readings of the cultural elite and, of course, in rhetorical theory. As noted above, following Hermogenes, theorists and rhetors continued to read and discuss the more *literary* pre-Byzantine texts. But the trend was to conceive their task as a delineation of *political* discourse, focused on ontological as well as moral truth (*aletheia*).

That said, Byzantine theorists never put forward a universal, comprehensive system of purely “political” discourse. Quite the contrary: even when they Christianize the canon of master-rhetors, or when they continue the emphasis on *politikos logos*, they neither create any systematically Christian theory of rhetoric (comparable to, say, Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*), nor moralize their rhetorical categories and hermeneutical habits to the extent that is prevalent in other contemporary discursive traditions, especially in medieval Latin or classical Arabic. Even if in explicit statements rhetoric is valued because of its “political” utility, rhetorical theory in Byzantium remains a fundamentally *aesthetic* enterprise by the manner that it is conducted, concerned as it is with discursive *form*, irrespective of moral or ontological imperatives. That is, when they conceptualize rhetoric as a discipline, theorists focus on the moral and ontological value of discourse; but when they analyze rhetorical style (which is indeed what they do most of the time), these same theorists are primarily what we might call *formalists*. Even in the most ideologically absorbed theorists, such as John Sikeliotēs who, among all Byzantine rhetors, comes the closest in elaborating a *Christian* conception of rhetoric

²⁷ The following three paragraphs summarize arguments presented in Papaioannou 2013: 88–127.

in some detail, rhetorical theory remains open to an alternative conception of rhetoric as a literary game, as pleasure-inciting language, as emotionally diverse representation, as a deeply performative *aesthetic* act beyond truth and virtue, as *mimesis* in its original connotations.

(c) A political conception of rhetorical communication suggests a conception of discourse that is focused on the *effect* of rhetoric upon the reader/listener and the community to which he belongs; this, we might add, was a typically Aristotelian conception of rhetoric. Nevertheless, Byzantine theorists were also preoccupied with the producer of discourse. Theirs was to a great extent an *author*-oriented theory. In that, they continued a tradition which was propagated by Hermogenes, who patterned ideal rhetoric after Demosthenes, and which was well represented in the Byzantines' own favorite, Gregory of Nazianzos. In this spirit, rhetorical manuals and treatises showed a keen interest in outlining, reinforcing, and expanding the individuality of a rhetor's voice. As such, these theoretical texts did not constitute a highly prescriptive and inflexibly objective system of rules and norms, but one that made much room for subjective choices. In this respect, we might add, they were similar to other Byzantine "disciplinary" discourses, such as ecclesiastical and imperial law.

Thus, parallel to the concern for "order" (*taxis*), emphasis was placed also on variability, adaptivity, and attention to the given "occasion" (*kairos*), subject-matter, and audience, as well as on "dispensation" (*oikonomia*), or, as Tzetzes puts it in his synoptic presentation of Hermogenian rhetoric, on "individual/particular quality" (*poiotes*).²⁸ The frequent praise of "variation" (*poikilia*; which takes unprecedented value in the work of Psellos) is one dimension of this guarding of individual choice and rhetorical autonomy. The preeminence of highly self-referential master-rhetors and speeches in the rhetorical canon is another aspect of it, especially in the valorization of Demosthenes' *On the Crown*, Aelius Aristides, Gregory of Nazianzos, and Psellos. But there are many more notions that focus on the rhetor, his ability to express himself or – and this is crucial – *create* an image of himself. For instance, *ethos* and *pathos*, character and emotion, are central among those categories that in Byzantine rhetorical texts had an ambiguous meaning: *ethos* indicated both the need for the rhetor to display his true and, ideally, moral character and the art of fabricating a certain *persona*; similarly, *pathos* denotes both the genuine expression of emotion and the manipulation of affect for the sake of persuasion. Thus, rhetoric in theoretical manuals often becomes effectively *the art and science of self-representation*, determined by the politics of the moment and the politics of the subject.

²⁸ Walz 1832–1836: v. 3, 685,9–15.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE(?)

To what extent did Byzantine rhetorical theory materialize its principles, ideas, and categories in actual discursive habits? The pessimistic view suggests a minimal interaction between the wider Byzantine discourse/culture and rhetorical theory. As has been remarked, “These handbooks and commentaries would have no impact outside the narrow group of the Byzantine educated elite.”²⁹ Indeed, like most other theoretical-discursive fields in Byzantium, rhetorical theory too was largely a closed field. After all, we may assume that rhetorical skill was often learned, transmitted, and developed by apprenticeship and by imitation of master-rhetors (contemporary or ancient), rather than by reading commentaries on the treatise *On Forms*. Nevertheless, if, as suggested in this chapter, we look at rhetorical theory on the one hand as a somewhat larger field that includes not just commentaries and, on the other, as being central to the cultural habit of rhetoric that reverberates in so many different corners of Byzantine society, we may find in rhetorical theory a culturally potent field. However this might be, we should not take too lightly the statement inserted by the authors of the *Souda* in their lemma on Hermogenes (E 3046): “The *Art of Rhetoric*, which everyone has close at hand (Τέχνην ῥητορικὴν, ἣν μετὰ χεῖρας ἔχουσιν ἅπαντες).”

²⁹ Jeffreys 2008: 830.

CHAPTER 7
BYZANTINE LITERARY CRITICISM
AND THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE

MANOLIS BOURBOUHAKIS

It is a paradox of Byzantine scholarship that a society rightly credited with preserving so much of the classical canon should not enjoy a better reputation for its critical reception of ancient Greek literature. Remembered primarily as assiduous copyists and curators of ancient manuscripts, the Byzantines have often been portrayed as irremediably blinkered in their literary criticism. But if it must be conceded that no Byzantine work of literary criticism compares in scale or renown to Aristotle's *Poetics* or Horace's *Ars poetica*, criticism was nevertheless highly valued in Byzantine literary culture. Broadly conceived, literary criticism could be so integral to the articulation of cultural, or even social, identity that we risk underestimating its role in Byzantine intellectual history rather than exaggerating it. If recent historical surveys of literary criticism no longer vault over the western Middle Ages, it is largely because scholars have become convinced of its existence and significance during this period. This is a salutary development due to an expanded definition of what may constitute literary criticism in any period.¹ No longer identified along a single, diachronic axis joining antiquity to modernity, it is increasingly understood in relation to the literary culture that it served. Western medieval authors such as Fulgentius, Alcuin, Remigius of Auxerre, and Bernard of Utrecht have thus entered the rolls as critics not because of any immediate affinity with our own practices but as having performed analogous cultural functions within their respective intellectual settings.

Recognition of criticism's role in Byzantine intellectual life has been slower in coming.² Many of the texts that might constitute a canon of Byzantine criticism have long been classified under the generic and, to many, intellectually uninviting rubrics of "rhetoric" or "philology." Such designations have tended to make Byzantine evaluations of ancient literature appear hamstrung by a narrow technical agenda. Byzantine essays or

¹ Minnis and Johnson 2005.

² E.g. the lone chapter on Byzantium in the volume cited in n. 1: Conley 2005; cf. Hörandner 1995–1996; Agapitos 2008. A singular sustained analysis of a work of Byzantine literary criticism along with its wider intellectual ramifications is Kustas 1962.

treatises on ancient literature can seem more like products of the school-room than the literary salon. The culprit here, as in many of Byzantium's perceived deficits of literary creativity and originality, was once thought to be *mimesis*, the cultural injunction to "imitate" the best literary practices of antiquity.³ But where it was once seen as a constraint or inhibiting factor in the development of original literature, *mimesis* is increasingly perceived by scholars as a highly adaptive cultural and intellectual framework, one that extended to literary criticism. Accordingly, the selective imitation of features of ancient literature is now more often thought to have promoted a critical approach to the ancient canon.⁴

The seeds of literary criticism were planted early on in the grammar schools. As students graduated to a level of rhetorical training that required identifying diverse modes of expression required on various occasions and genres, they were encouraged to scrutinize the style and structure of ancient texts on their syllabus. *Mimesis* thereby perpetuated the idea that the ancient canon could serve as a touchstone of correct or recommended usage, a fundamental principle of Byzantine criticism and one with manifold consequences for intellectual life. It is worth noting that a substantial part of ancient Greek literature was preserved precisely because it was perceived not as an antiquarian cultural artifact but as a vital source of aesthetics and composition. Staples of the school curriculum, the texts of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, and Isocrates, to name a select few, were subjected to relentless stylistic and, eventually, interpretative criticism. This dependency on antiquity for formal guidance in literary matters tethered intellectual activity in Byzantium to ancient Greek literature, thus permanently forestalling any "rediscovery" or "renaissance" of the sort that took place in western Europe.

Underpinning Byzantine criticism were ancient treatises, mainly from the Hellenistic and later Roman periods (c. 100 BCE–300 CE), akin to modern textbooks, which retailed guidance in nearly every aspect of rhetorical proficiency. Such handbooks vouchsafed criteria for what was described as "the evaluation of literature" (κρίσις ποιημάτων / *krisis poiematon*). Of these, the *Grammar* of Dionysios Thrax, *On the Attic Orators* and *Concerning the Style of Thucydides* by Dionysios of Halikarnassos, the essay *On Style* by pseudo-Demetrios, but above all the eponymous collection of teachings on composition ascribed to the late Roman rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsos, came to form an auxiliary canon of stylistic and broadly rhetorical instruction in Byzantium.⁵ Often in eclectic combination, the lessons contained in these and other handbooks formed the conceptual backbone of literary criticism from late Roman to late Byzantine times. They supplied a critical vernacular, a repertoire of stylistic labels keyed to particular effects and aesthetic values.

³ Hunger 1969–1970. ⁴ Rhoby and Schiffer 2010. ⁵ Kennedy 1959: 169–178; see Chapter 6.

These included “clarity” (σαφήνεια / *sapheneia*), “grandeur” (μέγεθος / *megethos*), “beauty” (κάλλος / *kallos*), “rapidity” (γοργότης / *gorgotis*), “character” (ἦθος / *ethos*), “sincerity” (ἀλήθεια / *aletheia*), and “forcefulness” (δεινότης / *deinotis*).

The aims of literary criticism in Byzantium were broadly similar to those of other periods: to foster a necessary discernment in literary matters. Criticism provided answers to questions about the types of style, what their characteristics are, and how are these achieved. In the words of Hermogenes, the late Roman exemplar most often studied by Byzantine critics, the goal was to gauge excellence and craftsmanship, or the lack of them. In most cases this amounted to judging whether specific stylistic choices were appropriate to the subject-matter and wider aims of a work. The following passage from Hermogenes confirms the importance of ancient literature for “criticism” (κρίσις / *krisis*):

I think that the types of style (ἰδέαι / *ideai*) are the most necessary subject for the orator to understand, both what their characteristics are and how they are produced. This knowledge would be indispensable to anyone who wanted to be able to evaluate (κρίνειν / *krinein*) the style of others, either of the older writers or of those who lived more recently, with reference to what is excellent and accurate, and what is not. And if someone wished to be the craftsman of fine and noble speeches himself, speeches such as the ancients produced, an acquaintance with this theory is also indispensable.⁶

The mutually reinforcing combination of μίμησις (*mimesis*) and κρίσις (*krisis*), emulation and evaluation, could of course prove circular: a set of formal ideals derived from a canon of exemplary ancient works was recycled in order to help future authors evaluate the selfsame works in a bid to choose the best models among them. Abstracted stylistic ideals such as “grandeur” and “forcefulness” originating in the works of, say, Thucydides or Homer might be used in a different setting to judge how successfully either met these same stylistic requirements. But the circularity could periodically give way and admit additional criteria. Nevertheless, the constellation of stylistic virtues prescribed by Hellenistic and later Roman rhetorical theory remained largely unchallenged in Byzantium. This explains, to some extent, why literary criticism from one period of Byzantine history remained sufficiently apposite to the expectations of any other.

THE JUDGMENTS OF PHOTIOS

As extensively as Byzantine critics may have drawn from the evaluative paradigm of the Hellenistic and late Roman handbooks, they nonetheless

⁶ Hermogenes, *On Types of Style* 1.1.

retained a considerable measure of independence. While “we must keep our eyes on the antecedents of Byzantine critical writing,” notes one scholar, “we must be careful not to assume a priori that those antecedents determined subsequent critical judgements.”⁷ It is often precisely in this breach between Byzantine criticism and its forerunners that intellectual change may be found. This may be seen in the diffuse criticism found in the *Bibliothèque* of the ninth-century scholar and patriarch Photios. A prodigious survey of nearly 400 prose texts, both secular and Christian, the *Bibliothèque* is a highly eclectic catalogue raisonné of Greek literature, including oratory, historiography, biography, novels, and a host of religious works ranging from hagiography to Church history. In addition to summing up the contents of each work, the *Bibliothèque*'s entries often provide a concise assessment of the work's style and weigh its contribution to the overall effectiveness of the text. To this end, Photios drew on a fixed inventory of literary qualities adopted largely, though not exclusively, from Hermogenes and the other rhetorical handbooks. He comments approvingly or critically on the presence or absence of formal characteristics such as “clarity,” “nobility of expression,” “grandeur,” “dignity,” “brilliance,” “beauty,” “vigorous pacing,” “character,” “artlessness,” and “pleasantness.” An example from the entry on Ktesias' *Persika*, an important work of ancient historiography otherwise lost, serves to illustrate Photios' method. After providing a generous account of the text's contents, he closes with the following note on the author's style:

This historian is both clear and altogether plain in style, which lends his narrative its share of charm (ἡδονή / *hedone*) . . . nor does he divert his narrative like [Herodotos does] by untimely digressions. Of course he, too, does not abstain from myths for which Herodotos is censured, especially in his composition of the *Indika*. The charm of his history lies chiefly in his arrangement of the narrative, which is rich in emotional and unexpected elements, as it does in his embellishment of the history with fabulous tales.⁸

Although often too synoptic to qualify as self-standing examples of criticism, read serially Photios' stylistic notes constitute a composite profile of Byzantine literary aesthetics during a period noted for its revival of classical forms.⁹ By taking critical stock of Byzantium's literary heritage, Photios was upholding the claims of a rhetorical tradition which held that meaning is coextensive with style. Beyond any abstract ideal of unity of form and content, however, attentiveness to literary style reflected the conviction that style was constitutive of *ethos*, a broadly defined sense of moral disposition and individual temperament inscribed in the text. Commenting on one of Demosthenes' orations, Photios notes the

⁷ Conley 2005: 671. ⁸ Photios, *Bibliothèque*, cod. 72. ⁹ Kustas 1962: 132–169.

consistency between the rhetorical character of the speech and Demosthenes' own politics and character:

[In Demosthenes'] oration *Against Meidias* . . . his vocabulary shows vigor and the composition is well-matched to its subject, so that making use of emotional arguments and rationale he clothes his speech in emotion. He exercises control over the *ethos* not just of this oration but in many others as well. Still, it is rather difficult for one who fashions opposition speeches to restrain his temperament, especially for those who happen to be naturally irritable and emotional.¹⁰

Criticism of this sort, combining a text's manner with its author's *ethos*, was not a Byzantine innovation. Ancient theorists as far back as Aristotle had sought links between an author's motive for writing and a text's rhetorical character. Grounded in Stoic philosophy during the Hellenistic age, "ethical" interpretation placed rhetoric and literature at the disposal of morality, a critical tendency further reinforced in a Christian society. As he surveyed a heterogeneous swath of literature, often on subjects unforeseen by ancient critics, Photios looked beyond the narrow repertoire of aims associated with classical rhetoric. In the spirit of Cicero's relativist dictum *quot officia oratoris, tot sunt genera dicendi* ("there are as many types of style as there are aims for an orator"), Photios admitted a plurality of stylistic combinations. He is thus able to praise the style of St. Paul's epistles by appealing to the virtues of classical rhetoric, all the while invoking Paul's inborn eloquence and heavenly endowment of expressive grace to account for non-classical elements in his writings.¹¹

The *Bibliotheke* coincided with, and may have even contributed to, the marked classicism which led to the commissioning of many of our best surviving manuscripts of ancient literature, including Homer, Sophokles, and Thucydides. The renewal of interest in the literary aesthetics of antiquity may rightly be described as a watershed in Byzantine intellectual life, with repercussions for the way educated Byzantines perceived and in turn described their reality.¹² Photios' pioneering project anticipated a readiness to reevaluate the tradition of rhetorical theory, as may be seen in the writings of two scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries, John Sikeliotes and John Doxopates. Both commented on the handbooks of Hermogenes, pseudo-Demetrios, and Dionysios of Halikarnassos, attempting to resolve discrepancies among them, even as they pointed to their limitations in accounting for the styles of venerable Christian authors.¹³ In some cases, they could invoke the precedent of pre-

¹⁰ Photios, *Bibliotheke*, cod. 265. ¹¹ Photios, *Letters* 165, 2.25–27; see Kustas 1962: 154–155.

¹² Vinson 2003: 9–22.

¹³ John Sikeliotes, *Commentary on Hermogenes' Types of Style* 282.18–27, 62.15–25, 242.5–10.

Christian critics. Thus Sikeliotēs noted that the esteemed ancient critic Longinos had praised the style of Moses as befitting the grandeur of its subject, foregrounding aesthetics in conjunction with morality.¹⁴ Commenting on the interdependence of thought and expression in literature, Doxapatres found fault with Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as insufficiently precise.¹⁵ Critics of the tenth and eleventh centuries nevertheless continued to evaluate literature primarily by appeal to the precedents of the ancient Greek past, though not without qualification.

Meanwhile, collections of scholia on ancient texts were gathered and circulated alongside rhetorical treatises, including the earliest copy of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in a bid to meet the demand for more informed judgments about ancient literature. After all, *mimesis* and the critical practices it fostered were not intellectually self-sustaining. Proficiency in the texts of antiquity was a badge of belonging to a social elite thought to have the intellectual wherewithal to administer the empire, the courts, and the Church. Literary criticism taught those aspiring to such positions how to distinguish themselves as connoisseurs of ancient literature, able to employ the Greek language with consummate precision and subtlety on every occasion and in any genre. Anyone claiming such proficiency had to offer evidence of the necessary discernment in matters of style. And few rhetors in Byzantium cultivated a reputation for such discernment as confidently as Psellos.

PSELLOS' COMPARISONS

The author of a number of works on rhetoric, Psellos professed peerless mastery of advanced composition and the philosophical interpretation of ancient texts. Among his writings are two short treatises in which he exhibits his critical prowess by comparing pairs of texts, in one case both ancient, in the other case one ancient and one Byzantine. Often billed as exercises, Psellos' two critical essays belong to the minor, academic genre known as the σύγκρισις (*synkrisis*, or comparison), the ostensible aim of which was to weigh the relative merits and demerits of two evenly matched texts, authors, or historical figures in a bid to award the palm to the superior one. In the first, Psellos purports to vindicate the ancient novelist Heliodoros as both a stylist and a storyteller by explaining away the apparent shortcomings of his widely read *Aithiopika*, a tale about young lovers tested by misfortune and threats to their chastity in remote lands. Psellos defends the supposed obscurity of the novel's phrasing, its allegedly prurient contents, and its implausibly articulate female lead, Charikleia.

¹⁴ Cf. Papaioannou 2013: 88–91.

¹⁵ John Doxapatres, *Prolegomena to the Progymnasmata of Aphthonius* 122.6–123.16, 103.10–21.

He appeals to the logic of the novel's plot and the requirements of its complex narrative structure. Psellos goes on to praise Heliodoros' text by contrasting it with the equally popular second-century novel *Leukippe and Kleitophon* by Achilles Tatios, whose style he admits is appealingly "clear and pleasant" but whose storyline he describes as even more salacious than Heliodoros'. Stressing the correct reception of literature, Psellos suggests that moral criticism leveled at the novels may be less a function of their ostensibly objectionable contents than of uninformed misreadings by unprepared young readers, an argument linking criticism to social as well as intellectual development.

The second, perhaps more unexpected and therefore bolder comparison is between the tragic poet Euripides and George of Pisidia, a Byzantine poet of the seventh century who composed historical panegyrics to celebrate the military campaigns of the emperor Herakleios as well as an account of Creation in iambic trimeters, the ancient metre of Attic drama. Psellos dwells on George's metrical virtuosity, at one point declaring him the most accomplished heroic poet – high praise indeed considering the field included Homer! In a barely concealed boast at the start of the essay, Psellos hints at his motive in making a case for George's equality, perhaps even superiority, to Euripides. The missing final sentences of this work have prompted speculation about Psellos' final verdict. But as the treatise's most recent editor observes, "there would have been little point in comparing George to one of the honoured ancients merely to find him inferior."¹⁶

The celebrated archetype of such contests was Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs*, in which (not coincidentally) Euripides' literary virtues were literally weighed against those of Aeschylus by the god Dionysos in the role of a bumbling critic. The Aristophanic echo may well have been an indication of the spirit of academic levity which such exercises elicited. It is, in any case, unlikely that Psellos' essay was intended to settle a genuine literary dispute. The comparison itself and its attendant aesthetic criteria mattered more than the verdict, since it showcased the critic's expertise.¹⁷ The exercises remind us that Byzantine critics were not in thrall to ancient canonical authors. In principle, at least, the merits of any text were always subject to debate. Psellos could thus pay tribute to the formal attainments of a Thucydides or Demosthenes, yet maintain that Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzos, hailed as Christian "classics" in their own right, easily rivaled the most illustrious Athenian authors.¹⁸ Indeed on certain stylistic counts, such as the ability to combine higher and lower registers in a bid to amplify their message and reach wider

¹⁶ Dyck, introduction to the edition, 34.

¹⁷ Psellos, *Comparison of Euripides and George of Pisidia* 40. ¹⁸ Hörandner 1996: 336–344.

audiences, Byzantine critics could maintain that the Christian Fathers had excelled their pagan forerunners. Psellos himself admitted that the Fathers may have trailed classical orators in style and structure, but this did not mean that Byzantine authors were invariably destined to compose their works in the shadow of the ancients.¹⁹

Psellos was adamant that his literary judgments were his own.²⁰ Despite his copious use of Hermogenes' stylistic categories, his own preference, he maintained, was for the "political and ennobling rhetoric" of Plato and Aristotle and not the "elaborate beauty" promoted by rival teachers who relied on textbooks. Whether because the field of those claiming formal expertise had become crowded, or because he found conventional literary debate wanting in philosophical depth, Psellos appears to have dismissed most literary criticism as little more than a kind of rhetorical scholasticism. In an oblique self-portrait of his life as intellectual doyen at the imperial court, he distinguishes between the narrowly academic jurisdiction of the rhetorician and the more profound province of a philosopher such as himself.²¹ In literature this claim rested largely on Psellos' broadly interpretative reading of ancient myth in widely read texts such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In a series of allegorical sketches, Psellos claimed to have plumbed the hidden depths of the poems. By trading on the Neoplatonic pedigree of allegorical interpretation, he effectively redefined literary criticism of pagan texts as a philosophic exercise requiring specialized knowledge beyond the conventional rhetorical curriculum. In one notable example, he recast events in the *Iliad* as Neoplatonic parables; in another, he unveils the Christian significations of the well-known Homeric passage in *Iliad* 4 where Zeus takes counsel with the other gods.²² Though probably intended as model exercises, these allegorical essays reveal the critic's ingenuity in correlating ancient verses with philosophical propositions or theological beliefs. But the lessons of allegory also serve to illustrate the desired interpretative acumen. Psellos implies that proper understanding of ancient literature may be a creative act in its own right. After Psellos, literary criticism increasingly resembles an arena for the display of intellectual talents and an ever greater erudition.

HELLENIC LITERATURE IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

It is sometimes suspected that Psellos' attempt to dress his literary instruction with philosophical pretensions may have been an expedient tactic to attract more students. Assuming that had been the case, it would have

¹⁹ Psellos, *The Literary Nature of the Church Fathers* 130.

²⁰ Psellos, *Scripta minora*, v. 1, 361.10–16, 370.5–18. ²¹ Psellos, *Chronographia* 7.4.

²² Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, 46.7–12.

appealed to prospective readers of ancient literature seeking meaning below the richly articulated surfaces mapped by conventional stylistic analysis. The result was an expansion of hermeneutic approaches to literary criticism in the next century. These took various forms, ranging from allegory to broadly protreptic or apotreptic exegesis, akin to traditional interpretation of biblical parables. Such readings had a long pedigree in both Judaic and pre-Christian Hellenic criticism. But they enjoyed renewed purpose in the efforts to reconcile pagan literature with Christian morality. If Byzantine literary criticism may be said to have had a hermeneutical, as well as a formal, preoccupation, it grew out of the efforts of early Christian intellectuals such as Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), who responded to the morally pressing question of whether, as well as how, to read pagan texts. Nearly all critical writing about classical texts in Byzantium was anchored in the productive compromise achieved in response to this dilemma.

Though not the first or the most pioneering of such works, Basil of Caesarea's fourth-century *Address to Young Men on How They Might Derive Profit from Hellenic Literature* may be read as the keynote defense of the classical canon by one of the religion's most authoritative figures and a paragon of style in his own right.²³ A commanding figure in patristic literature, Basil offered a rationalization of Hellenic *paideia* as intellectual handmaiden to Christianity's salvific truths. Pagan literature, Basil argued, could offer young minds not yet ready for the higher truths of Christian doctrine a chance to train their moral compass by first charting the ethical terrain of Greek poetry. While an abiding hostility toward ancient literature would persist in some of Byzantium's religious quarters, the compromise forged by Basil and other Christian humanists of the late antique period ensured that moral objections would never again decisively interfere with the classical education deemed vital to the standing of social elites and indispensable to the empire's literate administration. To ensure its survival, Hellenic literature would not just be grudgingly tolerated for the sake of stylistic imitation, as the grammarians and rhetoricians were wont to argue; it could also be read as propaedeutic to Christian ethics. This was a utility distinct from that itemized by style and it was effectively revived in the twelfth century as ancient texts were mined for hidden wisdom regarding correct conduct in various spheres of life.

To be sure, morality was not introduced to literary criticism with the advent of Christianity. Plato's censorious objections to archaic poetry in the *Republic* were an extreme example of a wider and enduring preoccupation with literature's ethical exempla. Plutarch's essay *How a Young Man*

²³ In his edition, Boulenger listed some eighty mss. of Basil's essay, testifying to its wide and enduring dissemination.

Should Listen to the Poets (= *Moralia* 14b–37b) – in all likelihood an archetype for Basil’s treatise – had already rehearsed the subject of how impressionable young minds could best derive moral instruction from a literature usually more admired for its capacity to amuse and for its brilliant stylistic effects. Byzantine literary criticism adapted in intellectually resourceful ways to this illiberal temperament. In the twelfth century, morally fastidious readings of classical literature (linked perhaps to an upsurge in doctrinal vigilance²⁴) appear as a foil for more sophisticated appreciation of ancient texts. This is entertainingly illustrated in a fictional debate which survives under the pseudonym “Philip the Philosopher.” Cast as a Platonic dialogue, the essay contends with the abiding quandary of how one ought to read morally controversial ancient literature. The story is prompted by an encounter between a veteran instructor and some younger literary enthusiasts who have come to seek help in defending Heliodoros’ *Aithiopika*, previously exonerated by Psellos. The young fans of the novel explain that the ancient romance has been branded obscene by “pretentious chatty philologists” who loiter in the vicinity of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Though initially reluctant to get involved in a debate about a book full of youthful romance which he facetiously describes as more suitable for the young, the Socratic figure nevertheless defends the novel. He counters the criticisms by inviting readers of a nobler disposition to entertain interpretations more likely to initiate the audience into the novel’s “covert” meaning. In a rapid interpretative *tour de force*, he offers a medley of allegorical, symbolic, and numerological analyses. These bear out his characterization of the ancient text as “an instructor of ethical philosophy, mixing the wine of theory with the water of narrative.”²⁵

Its near parodic tone and uncertain authorship notwithstanding, the fictional essay testifies to the intellectual energy with which ancient literature could be debated. It is worth noting, besides, that the anonymous critics of the entertainingly pagan novel are not identified as prudish ecclesiastics or austere monks but as narrow-minded “philologists” (although their location in the vicinity of Hagia Sophia may have been an allusion to the Church-sponsored schools misleadingly labelled by some scholars as the “patriarchal academy”).²⁶ Were these young men fictional stand-ins for the impressionable, misguided students given to morally insecure readings of ancient literature alluded to by Psellos? If this was the case, the fictional lesson in criticism was not a contest between the self-appointed stewards of religious probity on one side and partisans of risqué pagan literature on the other. This was a clash between self-identifying “sophisticated” readers and those whom they deemed naive critics lacking the necessary instruction to unlock the secrets of ancient literature.

²⁴ Magdalino 1993: 316–412. ²⁵ “Philip the Philosopher” 365–370, cf. Gärtner 1969.

²⁶ See Chapter 1.

TZETZES AND EUSTATHIOS ON ANCIENT POETRY

In twelfth-century Constantinople, authors who doubled as instructors vied for students, much as they did for sinecures in Church and state, or for private literary commissions.²⁷ In such a setting, literary criticism had the potential to serve as a stage on which the learned rhetor displayed his philological acuity and interpretative breadth. Two such authors, John Tzetzes and Eustathios of Thessalonike, illustrate the efforts made by professional rhetors to distinguish themselves as interpreters and critics of ancient literature. As detailed in the chapter by Eleanor Dickey in this volume, both were energetic scholars, offering instruction in the grammar, diction, and historical background of classical literature. And while neither is usually held to have written a fully fledged work of literary criticism in the narrow sense, a great deal of stylistic analysis and interpretative commentary underpins much of their scholarship.

Styling himself a literary tutor for hire to the empire's patron class, Tzetzes produced lengthy and elaborate "allegories" of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as an "exegesis" of the *Iliad*, intended to elucidate for his well-appointed readers the latent meaning of these foundational poems. To this end he adopted a rarefied system of tripartite allegorical analysis of Homeric epic combining "historical" (πρακτική / *praktike*), "anagogic" (ψυχική / *psychike*), and "elemental" (στοιχειακή / *stoicheiake*) readings of the stories. Tzetzes grounded his allegorical reasoning in the Homeric text itself, appealing in effect to what we might today call Homeric poetics.²⁸ He approached allegory not as an expediently retrofitted interpretation of the text but as an intrinsic aesthetic quality of the Homeric transformation of myth into epic. Rather than elide the historical and cultural remoteness of classical literature, Byzantine rhetors like Tzetzes made a point of underlining its distinctness, and with it their own expertise in bridging that historical gulf. No less significant for the aims of his readings was the decision to render them in an incommensurately demotic register of Greek, employing a popular rhythmical metre, instead of the Atticizing prose conventionally associated with the lofty tone of ancient literature. One plausible explanation may be that Tzetzes was keying the form of his allegories to the linguistic abilities and literary sensibilities of his moderately educated Komnenian patrons and their foreign brides. The shift in linguistic register and choice of a popular verse signal that literary criticism was itself not immune to the rhetorical necessity of matching text to context and audience.

Like Tzetzes and Psellos before him, Eustathios' writings on ancient literature proceeded mainly from his extensive teaching. His monumental

²⁷ Mullett 1984: 173–201. ²⁸ Cesaretti 1990 and 1991: 145–204.

Παρεμβολαί (*Parekbolai*, or “Commentaries”) on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* disassembled these landmark texts into their irreducible elements – word choice, grammar, figures of speech, historical context, and myth – in order to show the poet at work. Underwriting Eustathios’ teaching was the assumption that ancient authors may have written in a distinct idiom but they nevertheless harboured aims similar to those of a Byzantine author. Ancient texts could be reverse-engineered so that the rhetorical choices of the poet could be laid open for aspiring Byzantine authors to adopt. This promoted an enduring sense of affinity with the literature of antiquity across an otherwise vast historical, ideological, and religious divide.

Homeric epic is thus presented by Eustathios as a virtual apprenticeship in situational rhetoric, fostering an acute sense of ethos, or what is most appropriate in every scenario. What made Homer “a useful poet” (εὐχρηστος ποιητής / *euchrestos poietes*) were the lessons he offered in matching speech to circumstances. It was this expectation which led Eustathios to describe the *Iliad* as a rhetorical microcosm:

Composed dramatically by both simple and complex narration, [the *Iliad*] is full of myriad things that one would call good: philosophy, rhetoric, military skill, instruction on the ethical virtues, arts and sciences of every kind. From it someone can learn praiseworthy cleverness, the ploys of crafty liars, humorous wit, and the methods of oratory.²⁹

Eustathios does not mean, of course, that one may acquire from Homer the above-mentioned skills simply by reading epic. The Byzantine author may instead draw on the poems for examples of how best to broach such subjects in language. Once again κρίσις, or “judgment,” went hand-in-hand with μίμησις, adaptive “imitation.” If painstaking philological analysis and stylistic evaluation of this sort seem to us too much like a purely academic exercise, for Byzantine readers (“students new and old,” says Eustathios) it was not entirely detached from contemporary social and institutional reality. As both ceremonial and informal audiences for rhetorically adroit performances in every genre multiplied, the surge in commissions helped cast the social well-spring of ancient literature into greater relief. The links between authors and audiences, patrons and performers, became the object of critical scrutiny. Thus in the prologue to his planned, but in all likelihood uncompleted, commentary on Pindar’s *Epinikia*, or “Victory Odes,” Eustathios offered a generous and still appreciably valid estimate of the ancient poet’s literary achievement. But anticipating some modern scholarship on epinician poetics, Eustathios also takes note of the transactional quality of literary patronage. He speculates that the proportions of praise might have

²⁹ Eustathios, *Commentary on Homer’s Iliad* 1.1.

correlated with the sums paid out by the individual being celebrated.³⁰ Pindar's achievement, in Eustathios' estimate, was to join the economic calculus inherent to this mercenary genre with a singular lyricism. The Theban poet emerges from Eustathios' profile as a resourceful rhetorician, alternately expansive or spare in his digressions, "armed with a quiver full of verbal effects."³¹ If Eustathios appears at times to be reducing the artistry of Homer and Pindar to a narrowly utilitarian eloquence, we should recall that his criticism was tailored to the needs of future court orators and rising courtiers. Such imitation did not, however, preclude appreciation of classical texts. "There are models," Eustathios writes in the introduction to his *Commentary on Homer's Iliad*, "that can be used by someone who wishes to mimic them that cause us to marvel at the poet's artistry."³²

THEODORE METOCHITES' ESSAYS ON ANCIENT WRITERS

Evident in countless of Eustathios' remarks on Homer was the assumption that analysis of ancient texts could be used to illustrate the reciprocal link between life and literature, between the world and the word. Few were as well placed to argue the point as Theodore Metochites, a long-serving minister at the court of Andronikos II in the early fourteenth century, an author and court official notable for both his political shrewdness and his literary output. As near to a humanist in the familiar sense as one may find in the late Byzantine world, Metochites wrote incisive essays on Plato and Aristotle, as well as on Xenophon, Plutarch, Dio of Prusa, Josephus, and Philo of Alexandria. Among the topics he discusses are the formal implications of Plato's dialogue form or what he describes as Aristotle's deliberately obfuscating and evasive style. Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of his critical essays is the way he joins a carefully measured esteem for ancient literature to a conspicuous unwillingness to submit to ancient authority in literary matters. Almost anticipating the American critic Harold Bloom's theory about the "anxiety of influence," Metochites observes that Plato and Aristotle were similarly undeferential to their own predecessors. He thus finds a warrant in ancient literature for his own intellectual autonomy.

Metochites demonstrates his independence by setting aside commonplace teachings about the canonical texts of antiquity. In defiance of stylistic conventions that had long maintained an absolute scale of rhetorical virtues, Metochites proposed that judgments about successful styles were contingent on circumstance, not least on the political context. Making use of the comparative format much as Psellos had, Metochites

³⁰ Eustathios, *Preface to the Commentary on Pindar* 2.2, 3.2. ³¹ *Ibid.* 3.1.

³² Eustathios, *Commentary on Homer's Iliad* 1.3.

profiles the relative merits of that paragon of classical oratory, Demosthenes, alongside the second-century sophist Aelius Aristeides, a Graeco-Roman author less celebrated today but much studied in Byzantium. For any ancient author to serve as an exemplar, argued Metochites, his works should not be judged by applying fixed, a priori aesthetic principles. Demosthenes may have displayed all the authorial qualities and rhetorical virtues which suited democratic Athens. But his style, argues Metochites, was an extension of the political activity made possible by that form of government. As one who made a career under Roman emperors, on the other hand, composing for public performances instead of political assemblies and forced to substitute charming eloquence for forceful persuasion, Aristeides drew on the stylistic strengths suitable to his time. The political parallels, Metochites argues, between late Byzantine society and that of the Antonines, should determine which author was the more suitable model, not abstract standards of literary merit. Literature is thus presented not just as an extension of an author's personal ethos, but as betraying its time and place. This was a degree of pragmatism rarely to be found in ancient or Byzantine literary analysis.

Not neglecting the formal side of literature, Metochites inverts the conventional rhetorical hierarchies. He emphasizes the unadorned naturalness of a writer such as Plutarch, whose uncontrived prose was not due to a want of eloquence, Metochites reassures his readers; it was a choice consistent with Plutarch's focus on "ethical precepts, political judgments, and considerations regarding rightful conduct."³³ Alluding perhaps to his contemporaries' (as well as his own) penchant for recondite language, Metochites offers proof that Plutarch suppressed his ability to produce more stylistically accomplished literature by referring to that author's "frequent judgments on orators and their individual style and natural talent."³⁴ Plutarch's relative plain-spokenness and intelligibility are presented as the marks of a man "who is a philosopher, free-born in his speech, raised above every flattery, deceit, and in general any ornate language."³⁵ Metochites again stresses the link between the politics of a "free-born" man, beholden to no one, and the manner of his writing or speech. It is tempting to read this observation about the circumspection and flattery appropriate to life under an autocratic regime as an oblique critique of literary life in Byzantium, all the more so as it comes from someone so close to the throne.³⁶ Whatever his thoughts on the subject, Metochites' forthrightness about the historical contingency of language and literature reminds us that Byzantine critics were anything but naive regarding the social and political dimension of their own intellectual life.

³³ Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai* 71. ³⁴ *Ibid.* 71.4. ³⁵ *Ibid.* 71.7. ³⁶ Ševčenko 1974: 7–30.

CONCLUSION

Few of the judgments of Byzantine literary criticism would be shared by scholars today. This is not due to any inherent flaw or shortcoming in the Byzantine understanding of the Greek classics. It is due, instead, to differences in the function of literary criticism.³⁷ The privileged position that Byzantine criticism accorded to ancient literature became the proving ground for larger debates about the nature and purpose of language.³⁸ Ultimately, however, it matters less whether we are persuaded by Byzantine readings. The more salient question is what significance was attached to such evaluations of the ancient canon in Byzantine intellectual life. By introducing nimbleness into the stylistic criteria derived from ancient models, criticism helped extend the life of literary classicism in Byzantium for well over a millennium.

To a modern audience accustomed to associating intellectual vibrancy with a rapid succession of ideas, tastes, and styles, the conceptual framework of Byzantine criticism may seem unimaginatively static. But engagement with ancient literature could prompt renewal and surprising innovation. This was the case, for example, with the extraordinary revival of the fictional novel in the twelfth century. Long dormant as a genre, the ancient novels continued to attract both critical attention and readers, as one can infer from the analysis of Photios in the ninth century, Psellos in the eleventh, and “Philip the Philosopher” in the twelfth. Replete with self-referential allusions to themselves as literature, the new romance novels of the Komnenian era were also a response to the critical reception of their ancient predecessors. Byzantine romantic fiction found a receptive public, created in part by critical appreciation of the ancient novel.

It is nevertheless hard to gauge with precision the cultural repercussions of literary criticism in Byzantium, just as it would be to do so for Horace’s Rome, Sir Philip Sidney’s England, or Harold Bloom’s America. In the words of one scholar, the study of such criticism allows us “to gain . . . information about which ways of expression were consciously sought, what was regarded as good rhetoric and what was not, what was seen as a mere tendency and what as a rhetorical or poetical rule.”³⁹ In short, it grants us access to such significant intangibles as literary taste and the importance attached to style as expressive of thought. Moreover, criticism sustained the relevance of an otherwise remote classical heritage. As such, it encouraged a form of literary inquiry which sought answers to present dilemmas in the prototypes of the past. In a statement that captures the *ethos* of Byzantine

³⁷ Agapitos 2008: 77–85. ³⁸ Browning 1978: 103–133. ³⁹ Hörandner 1996: 337.

literary criticism, Eustathios observes that “[s]omeone who hears the expression ‘the poet’ thinks of Homer on account of the definite article. Why? Because [Homer] displays every virtue of poetry and because he has become the seed and instructor to all ‘creators of reality,’ as poets are called.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Eustathios, *Commentary on Homer’s Iliad* 1.6.

CHAPTER 8
THEORIES OF ART

CHARLES BARBER

At the outset of this brief chapter, it is important that the topic be given some definition, as it is arguable that the subject of this contribution does not exist. For while Byzantium has certainly bequeathed a rich body of artifacts that we have chosen to define as works of art, it is arguable that Byzantine culture did not share our concept of “art.”¹ Given this potential challenge to our assumptions, there is a need to ask whether “art” is an appropriate term and so whether the modern philosophical discipline that is indicated by the term “aesthetics” can inform our attempts to grapple with the conceptualizations of “art” that developed and circulated within Byzantine culture.² While attempts have been made to bring such aesthetics to bear upon Byzantium, it is debatable whether they have brought clarity to our perception of Byzantine art or aesthetics.³ Similarly, it is unclear whether conceptualizations of the image that have been drawn from twentieth-century theology or dialogues with modernity have allowed a sufficiently historical understanding of Byzantine art to emerge.⁴

There have been relatively few studies of Byzantine theories of art or aesthetics as they pertain to the visual arts. André Grabar’s essays from the 1940s and 1950s framed Byzantine art in terms of a Neoplatonic legacy that reached back to Plotinos.⁵ Gervase Mathew’s *Byzantine Aesthetics* subsequently provided a fuller historical account that focused upon four themes: “a recurrent taste for classical reminiscence,” “an essentially mathematical approach to beauty,” “an absorbed interest in optics” especially light, and “a belief in the existence of an invisible world of which the material is the shadow.”⁶ Viktor Bychkov’s numerous books emphasize a spiritual dimension within Byzantine aesthetics.⁷ More recently, a collection of essays, *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, has underlined the value of specific readings of the texts in play.⁸ In addition, two lengthy studies have

¹ A point perhaps most forcefully made in Belting 1994. Recent work on the Renaissance has complicated this rigid distinction, for example Nagel and Wood 2010; Nagel 2011.

² Kristeller 1951–1952. ³ E.g. Michelis 1955.

⁴ Provocative and interesting recent studies include Antonova 2010; Tsakiridou 2013.

⁵ These have been brought together in Grabar 1992. ⁶ Mathew 1963: 1.

⁷ Bychkov 1997, 1983, and 2001. ⁸ Mariev and Stock 2013.

brought Byzantine conceptions of the image into dialogue with contemporary philosophical perspectives. Marie-José Mondzain has argued for the relevance of the patriarch Nikephoros' defense of the icon for modern discussions of the image,⁹ while Georges Arabatzis has provided a rich philosophical discussion of Byzantine aesthetics that revisits the ethical implications of the icon through an extensive engagement with both Byzantine authors and twentieth-century philosophy.¹⁰

Yet despite these essays and monographs, it remains the case that we still do not have a thorough and historical account of Byzantine visual aesthetics. Indeed, much preparatory work remains to be done, as too few of the key texts have been fully studied. Given the preliminary state of our understanding of Byzantine "art" and "aesthetics," this chapter will take a narrow approach and will focus on the argument that a conceptualization of the icon as a work of "art" became a theological necessity and that this definition of the work of art as a record of human visual perception provided a continuing point of debate throughout Byzantium's history. This chapter will, therefore, follow this aspect of visual theory, rather than attempt to embrace a broader understanding of "aesthetics" in terms of the senses or human perception or beauty. For while these were significant aspects of a broader discussion of aesthetics in the ancient world, their precise relation to "art" remains to be more clearly and fully defined.¹¹

In the course of this chapter, it will become clear that Plato and Aristotle remained profoundly influential for the development of discussions about art in Byzantium. Nonetheless, the most immediate point of departure for consideration of Byzantine theories of art remains late antiquity and the Neoplatonism of Plotinos (205–270) and Proklos (410–485). Two aspects of their discussions are particularly noteworthy. First, and particularly in the work of Proklos, beauty is distinguished from the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν / *to agathon*).¹² Second, a symbolic understanding of *mimesis* was developed.¹³ Each notion may be seen at play in early Byzantine thought. While this was most clearly manifest in the writings of pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite (c. 500?), it is possible to identify a more broadly Neoplatonic strand in sixth-century writings on art and on beauty.¹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysios' writings open the way to a symbolic understanding of visual experience:

⁹ Mondzain 2005. ¹⁰ Arabatzis 2012 and 2013a.

¹¹ For recent discussion on beauty in Byzantium consult Mariev 2011 and 2013. For discussion of the senses in Byzantium see n. 30 below. The question of perception might be traced through the legacy of Aristotle's *De anima* and *De sensu*; preliminary remarks at Barber 2007: 93–96.

¹² Discussion of Plotinos on beauty is extensive. Among recent studies, consult Vassallo 2009; Büttner 2006: 177–192. On Proklos, see Mariev 2013.

¹³ Coulter 1976; Sheppard 1980.

¹⁴ On pseudo-Dionysios and beauty, see Beierwaltes 1989; Koutras 1995; Stock 2013.

But let us leave behind as adequate for those who are uninitiated regarding contemplation those signs which, as I have said, are splendidly depicted on the entrances to the inner sanctuary. For our part, however, when we think of the sacred synaxis [i.e. the Eucharist] we must move in from effects to causes and, in the light which Jesus will give us, we will be able to glimpse the contemplation of the conceptual things clearly reflecting a blessed original beauty. And you, O most divine and sacred sacrament: Lift up the symbolic garments of enigmas which surround you. Show yourself clearly to our gaze. Fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and unveiled light.¹⁵

It is a hierarchical model that allows contemplative initiates to see divine things thanks to the provision of light by the deity. It seeks to surpass the things depicted in the world and attain direct contemplation of the intelligible reality of divine beauty. Clearly indebted to Neoplatonism, such distinctions were criticized during the Iconoclastic dispute.¹⁶ Despite this ambiguous legacy, the desires expressed in this passage will, as seen below, recur in Byzantine visual theory.

While early Byzantine aesthetics owed much to the Neoplatonists, it distinguished itself from this tradition by seeking to recover a more positive value for matter and materiality.¹⁷ This lay in the belief that matter was God's creation and therefore must be inherently good.¹⁸ It also derived from the increasing importance placed on Christ's human nature in the theological debates of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.¹⁹ The interplay of materialism and symbolism that marks this era is brought together in an epigram written by Agathias (c. 532–c. 580):

The wax – how daring! – molded the invisible, the incorporeal archangel in the semblance of his form. Yet it was no thankless [task], since the mortal man who beholds the image directs his spirited impulse by way of a superior imagination. His veneration is no longer distracted: engraving within himself the model, he trembles as if he were in the latter's presence. The eyes stir up a deep intellection, and art is able by means of colors to ferry over the heart's prayer.²⁰

These words evoke a powerful response to a material image that has become a means of connecting the body, mind, and spirit of the viewer to the subject depicted in the icon. It would take the two centuries of

¹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysios, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 81–82.5–12 (428 BCE); tr. Luibheid, Rorem, and Roques 212.

¹⁶ Louth 1997; Ivanovic 2010.

¹⁷ The discussion of the creation of the world in sixth-century Alexandria provides ample witness to this: Sorabji 1988.

¹⁸ E.g. pseudo-Dionysios, *Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 3 (pp. 12–13, 141A–C).

¹⁹ A point that comes to fruition in John of Damascus' positive accounts of materiality in his *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (see below).

²⁰ *Greek Anthology* 1.34; tr. in Pizzone 2013: 78–79.

debate that marked the Iconoclastic era (c. 680–870) to resolve the implications of the ideas contained in this text.

The eighth and ninth centuries in Byzantium witnessed extensive debates over the icon and its veneration.²¹ In the course of these theological discussions, a distinctively Christian theory of art emerges. In particular, the work of art becomes more clearly defined as a necessary and distinct witness to the Christian economy of salvation. In order to defend the veneration of images, iconophile theologians first needed to state what it was that was being venerated. As their discussions unfolded, they described the relation between an icon and the subject it depicted in ways that sought to distance the work of art from the Neoplatonic notions of the image that had evolved in late antique discourse.

Early in the discussion, perhaps in the 740s, John of Damascus (c. 675–c. 750) had asked, What is an Image (τί ἐστὶν εἰκὼν; / *ti estin eikon*)?²² In response, he first tells us that an image bears a likeness to something that differs from it and that the purpose of the image is to lead us to that which is hidden.²³ Having thus retained the symbolic aspect of the image already noted in the text of Agathias, John then places the icon within a broad definition of the image. This begins with the Trinitarian proposition that the Son is the image of the Father. The next kind of image is God’s foreknowledge. The third kind is man, who is made in the image and likeness of God. The fourth is exemplified by those Old Testament terms that indicate things that do not exist physically. The fifth consists of Old Testament prefigurations. The sixth “arouses the memory of past events, whether wonders or acts of virtue for glory and honor, and memorials of the bravest and of those who excel in virtue.” Yet “this kind of image is twofold: words written in books . . . and things seen by the sense of sight.”²⁴ The icon is thus granted a commemorative function that is more fully explained in the following passage:

We also long to see and to hear and to be blessed. They [the disciples] saw him [Christ] face to face, since he was present to them bodily; in our case, however, since he is not present bodily, even as we hear his words through books and are sanctified in our hearing and through it we are blessed in our soul, and venerate and honor the books, through which we hear his words, so also through the depiction of images we behold the form of his bodily character and the miracles and all that he endured, and we are sanctified and assured, and we rejoice and are blessed, and we revere and honor and venerate his bodily character. Beholding his bodily form, we also understand the glory of his divinity as powerful. For since we

²¹ For a succinct account of the development of iconophile ideas on image, see Barber 2002. For a broader discussion of the period and the place of images in eighth- and ninth-century Byzantium, see Brubaker and Haldon 2011.

²² John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, ed. p. 125; tr. p. 95.

²³ *Ibid.* ed. pp. 125–126; tr. pp. 95–96. ²⁴ *Ibid.* ed. pp. 126–130; tr. pp. 96–100.

are twofold, fashioned of soul and body, and our soul is not naked but, as it were, covered by a mantle, it is impossible for us to reach what is intelligible apart from what is bodily.²⁵

Clearly John's definition of the image owes much to ideas presented in the sixth-century texts discussed above.

But John's framing of the icon, while crucially building upon the incarnational and materialist discourses of the seventh century, notably those found in the writings of Leontios of Neapolis and Anastasios of Sinai, did not clearly describe the relationship between the image itself and its subject.²⁶ Having begun his definition of the image with a Trinitarian definition, he implies an icon may to some degree be consubstantial with its subject. For this reason, Iconoclast theologians were able to ask whether it was possible for an icon to present both Christ's human nature and his divine nature? The difference between an image and its subject, that was identified in John and in the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council that met in Nicaea, was strengthened and clarified by the work of ninth-century theologians who gave greater precision to their definition through the relentless application of Aristotle's logic.²⁷ By these means, the patriarch Nikephoros I (c. 750–828) and Theodore the Stoudite (759–826) in particular defined a new conception of the icon, effectively distancing their theory from the Neoplatonist legacy of late antiquity.²⁸

Nikephoros and Theodore wrote extensively in defense of the icons. Much of this material remains in older editions and requires modern translations. Nonetheless, their writing provides a clear definition of the icon and is the fundamental and authoritative ground for the Byzantine understanding of the icon and its veneration. For example, in his *Second Refutation of the Peuseis of Constantine V*, Nikephoros offers this definition of the icon:

The archetype is an existing origin and paradigm of a form portrayed after it, the cause from which the resemblance derives. Moreover, one may speak of the icon in this definition as of artistic things: an icon is a likeness of an archetype, having represented in itself by means of likeness the entire form of the one being represented, distinguished only by a difference of essence, that is with respect to matter; or an imitation and copy of an archetype, differing in essence and subject, or an artifact completely formed in imitation of an archetype, but differing in essence and subject. For if it does not differ in some respect, it is not an icon nor an object different from the archetype. Thus, an icon is a likeness and representation of things being and existing.²⁹

Each definition inflects our understanding of the icon as a work of art, borrowing from the language of the *Categories* to sharpen the distinction

²⁵ *Ibid.* ed. p. 123; tr. p. 93. ²⁶ Déroche 1994; Uthemann 1981. ²⁷ Parry 2013.

²⁸ Cf. Elsner 2012. ²⁹ Nikephoros, *Second Refutation of the Peuseis of Constantine V* 277A.

between the icon and its subject. The point is then developed when Nikephoros argues that things that exist should never be confused with the things that are shown in images:

While in circumscription he [a man] is of necessity present, in what is painted nothing is present . . . for while a man is certainly painted in his icon, he is not circumscribed in it, as it is not the place proper for circumscription. And the means of these are distinguished by all [men]. For one depicts a man with colors and mosaics, as the situation demands, drawing with varied and many means, and differing in brilliances. Never but never is he to be circumscribed by these means, since it has been said that circumscription is something else again. Moreover, painting presents the corporeal form of the one depicted, impressing its outline, shape, and resemblance. Whereas circumscription, having nothing in common with these three modes of which we have spoken, delimits boundaries. Painting has a relation in terms of likeness to the archetype, and is and is called a painting of the archetype.³⁰

Nikephoros therefore insists upon a radical distinction between an icon and the person it depicts. His contemporary, Theodore the Stoudite, reiterates the point when he says that:

No one could ever be so insane as to suppose that shadow and truth, nature and art, original and copy, cause and effect are the same in essence; or to say that “each is in the other, or either one is in the other.” That is what one would have to say if he supposed or asserted that Christ and his icon are the same in essence. On the contrary, we say that Christ is one thing and his icon is another thing by nature, although they have an identical name. Moreover, when one considers the nature of the icon, not only would one not say that the thing seen is Christ, but one would not even say that it is the icon of Christ. For it is perhaps wood, or paint, or gold, or silver, or some one of the various materials which are mentioned. But when one considers the likeness to the original by means of a representation, it is both “Christ” and “of Christ.” It is “Christ” by homonymy, “of Christ” by relation.³¹

Theodore here also provides a fuller account of the relation that binds icon and subject, by arguing that the material icon in itself cannot be considered Christ, but when it is contemplated in terms of a relation that is mediated by homonymy and likeness, the common name and the common appearance, the viewer is able to overcome the material difference.

The theologians of the Iconoclastic era thus bequeathed a theory of the icon that defined it as an object that was bound to its subject, yet essentially distinct from this subject. The distinction rested upon a relational economy developed from Aristotle’s *Categories*. This distinction made it safe for Christ and the saints to be represented as it clearly laid out that the icon did not implicate the subject itself in its being. It was primarily a visual theory,

³⁰ *Ibid.* 357B–D. ³¹ Theodore the Stoudite, *First Refutation of the Iconoclasts* 341BC.

making likeness crucial to the economy of the icon. Other senses could be implicated in what was shown and in the miraculous activities that might be associated with icons but the icon's primary function was to commemorate the human visual perception that affirmed the reality of Christ's historical Incarnation.³²

Discussion of Byzantine visual theory as it pertains to art has tended to focus on the early period and has thus come to treat the Iconoclastic era and the theology that emerged then as a concluding moment. While the theology of that era remained crucial to future debates over the image, it did not limit those debates. For the icon continued to be a significant topic of debate among theologians and philosophers, perhaps attesting to the value placed upon the icon by this culture.³³ For example, the eleventh century witnessed a vigorous series of discussions over the icon,³⁴ which reveal some dissatisfaction with the limited account of the image bequeathed by the Iconoclastic era. As has been seen, the latter had left the icon as a precise visual record of the human perception of Christ's hypostasis. But being constrained by such human dimensions, it was arguable that while the icon could indicate holy persons it could not provide complete access to them. For this reason we find Michael Psellos seeking means for overcoming the ordinary status of the image by investigating the miraculous. Psellos wrote extensively on art and its perception. The main threads of his thought on this topic are drawn together in the following text, a letter:

I am a most fastidious viewer of icons; but one astonished me by its indescribable beauty and like a bolt of lightning it disabled my senses and deprived me of my power of judgment in this matter. It has the Mother of God as its model and has been painted in regard to her. Whether it is similar to Her (that supernatural image of beauty), I do not quite know. I know this much and just this much, that the corporal nature has been faithfully imitated by means of the mixing of colors. Yet the form is incomprehensible to me and is sometimes apprehended visually and sometimes conceptually.

I do not therefore write about what I have beheld, but what I have experienced. For it seems that having completely exchanged its nature, it was transformed and acquired a divine-like beauty and surpassed visual perception. Yet, because of this, she neither looks stern nor is she again decked out in a singular beauty; rather she is

³² For the relationship of the icon to the other senses, see James 2004 and 2011; Pentcheva 2010.

³³ The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, the fundamental profession of Orthodox doctrine, places the icon at the center of its definition of what it means to be Orthodox. Several of those condemned in later iterations of this text, for example, John Italos and Eustratios of Nicaea, were targeted for their extensive use of the Greek philosophical tradition to address theological questions. This reminds us that while a hard distinction between philosophy and theology is difficult to determine, it was a distinction that could be drawn when deemed necessary.

³⁴ For an introduction to this era, see Barber 2007.

beyond both these measures and descends into knowledge only so much that, while her shape is not known, she astounds the viewer.

She has been depicted interceding with the Son and eliciting mercy for men, as is customary in both truth and images. Moreover, she entertains no doubts in her supplication nor does it appear that she laments over her request; rather, she calmly extends her hands in anticipation of receiving His grace and is confident in her prayer. The bolts from her eyes are miraculous in every direction. For she is divided between heaven and earth so that she might have both: both the one (i.e. Christ) whom she approaches, and the people for whom she supplicates.

At any rate this is what I grasped seeing the icon for the first time. After that, having astounded me, it surpassed my ability to see. Because of it, the monastery of *ta Kathara* is fortunate; more so than the earth is fortunate because of Edem.³⁵

This letter is a powerful text that delights in the moment when the senses are surpassed and the image may also be experienced conceptually. It is at that moment that the icon can link heaven and earth by becoming the site for the actual manifestation of the subject previously depicted in the image. Strongly rooted in the Neoplatonism of late antiquity, Psellos' writings on art return persistently to this miraculous moment when the material icon can actually become the subject seen in the icon, thus momentarily overcoming the relative constraints that theology had imposed upon the ordinary icon.³⁶

Taking a different path, Leo of Chalcedon (fl. 1080s and 1090s) attempted to find the divine nature within the icon, but apart from its material aspect.³⁷ Thus, when writing in the early 1090s to his nephew Nicholas of Adrianople, Leo argued that: "While the iconic matter is to be worshipped honorably and relatively (this relation being mediated by the divinized portrait of Christ), when we see his portrait in itself, not through something else, but through itself, we worship in terms of adoration."³⁸ It is an argument that distinguishes between the kinds of worship that may be addressed to the icon. In particular, Leo seeks to negotiate the mediating role of the icon by arguing that when one looks through the material medium of the icon, the image may receive a relative worship. On the other hand, when one looks at the portrait itself and not through the medium of the icon, then this portrait may receive adoration.

In response to this attempt to define a place for the divine nature in the icon, Eustratios of Nicaea (fl. 1080s–c. 1120) wrote two extensive treatises in the early 1090s that reasserted the importance of the medium and that then returned this medium to the relational economy defined by Nikephoros

³⁵ A new edition and translation of the letter, formerly Psellos, *Letter KD* 194 is now available in Barber and Papaioannou 2017: 374–376, with discussion at 248–253; see also Cutler and Browning 1992: 27–28.

³⁶ For an introduction to Psellos' discussion of art, see Barber 2007: 61–98.

³⁷ Carr 1995; Barber 2007: 131–157. ³⁸ Leo of Chalcedon, *Letter to Nicholas of Adrianople* 415A.

and Theodore.³⁹ A sense of his method and his understanding of the status of the work of art may be found in his later commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Since substance is Being in the proper sense, the things in and around substance are not beings proper, but each is said to be a kind of being and a kind of being *of* substance, as the quantity of substance, or the quality of substance or the relation or position, like lying, standing, and leaning, or substance being in a place or in time or any of the other nine categories [of Aristotle]. Each of the arts is likewise, since something is worked from the underlying substance in the substance and around the substance. That which is known is that which is worked out and inheres in and around substance. This is artistic form, which is brought forth by the artist in the material proper to that art. And this [artistic form] is an accident, and therefore something that is not properly being, so that the excellence and perfection concerning it [i.e. accident] is a kind of wisdom. But wisdom proper derives from the knowledge of beings, that is, of substances, which are not a kind of being, but being proper, namely, not accident, which is a kind of being, but substance or being proper. Just as we say about coming-to-be, on the one hand, that the coming-to-be of accident from non-being is not coming-to-be proper but a kind of coming-to-be, and on the other, that the coming-to-be of substance is complete and not a kind of coming-to-be on account of its actually being complete, as Aristotle has taught us, so too is the knowledge and wisdom of each accident a kind of knowledge and a kind of wisdom. And the man who is wise in this wisdom is a kind of wise man about something kind of wise, and the man wise about substances and the things in themselves that follow upon substances is completely wise and wise in the proper sense, and moreover he is the best of all in wisdom, who concerns himself with the most fundamental aspects of beings and the best wisdom is his science, namely, theology.⁴⁰

Eustratios has made a strong claim for the work of art, defining it as a form of theological knowledge. In response to Leo, he once more reverted to Aristotle's categories but applied these more directly to the question of worship. In particular, he argues that worship by means of an icon must be distinguished from direct worship – that is adoration – of God.⁴¹ Hence: “While our worship [understood as adoration] of him is unmediated, the imitation [of him] is mediated.”⁴² This mediating function of the icon is founded upon the accidental nature already introduced in the passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Yet the icon takes the outline and the shape of the depicted, not the essence. The outline and shape are simply a quality and the fourth kind of quality. Every quality is simply an accident. No accident should be adored. Equally no outline or

³⁹ For an introduction to Eustratios' discussion, see Barber 2009.

⁴⁰ Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 319.37–320.19.

⁴¹ Eustratios of Nicaea, *Dialogue on How the Holy Icons Should Be Worshipped* 149. ⁴² *Ibid.* 148.

shape should be adored. What we are talking about when we talk about the icon is perfectly obvious: the artistic and the mimetic. The pre-eternal Divine Logos has assumed into himself at the end of days the additional [human nature] from the Theotokos, [who is] the first fruit of our mixture. The hypostasis of the Divine Logos has required the adoption of our nature, so that the two natures might be contemplated in the one hypostasis. So, just as the Son of God has maintained his infallible hypostatic particularities, according to which the hypostasis is distinguished from the Father and the Spirit. So, too, did the Son of Man possess other particularities by which he differs from the mother and other men. What are these secondary things, essence or accident? By which I mean, colors, size, perhaps the curve of a nose, or the hair for instance, or the outlines from which he has emerged: the eyebrows, the eyes, and each part that is manifest on his exterior, by means of which when we see them on icons we recognize who each icon is representing.⁴³

It is because of this accidental nature, which provides us with a clear account of the icon as a product of human art, that the icon cannot offer direct access to the essence of its subject, as it can only convey the external qualities of that subject. Eustratios' texts, as well as the florilegium prepared for the Council of Blachernai (1094) and the doctrinal text prepared by Euthymios Zigabenos (fl. early twelfth century) reflect a reassertion of core ninth-century iconophile doctrine that appears to mark a continuity of thought even as it masks the contested status of the icon that had emerged in intellectual circles in eleventh-century Byzantium.⁴⁴

The fourteenth century also witnessed significant discussion of the status of the icon. This was an era marked by intensive theological debate that culminated in the affirmation of Palamite theology at the Council of Constantinople (1351).⁴⁵ In the course of these debates, Nikephoros Gregoras (1290/1–1361) charged Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) with iconomachy, or opposition to icons.⁴⁶ He did so because he believed that Palamas failed to engage properly with the icon as a medium and thence denigrated the human perception that the work of art commemorated. This argument is summarized in a passage that Nikephoros Gregoras quoted from patriarch Nikephoros' critique of Eusebios' *Letter to Constantia*, a fourth-century text that had been an important resource for Iconoclasts:

Is something that is, and is substantial for itself alone and for no other, truly something that exists, or being bodiless and a non-being can it be contemplated in something else and not in itself? But if this [the divine light that was at the heart of the debate over Palamas' thought] is essential and angelic, then do both the angelic light and the light of the foremost and highest [the Godhead] flash and shine

⁴³ *Ibid.* 154–155. ⁴⁴ Barber 2007: 131–157.

⁴⁵ For an introduction to the history and doctrinal issues, see Meyendorff 1964.

⁴⁶ Lukhovitskij 2013.

forth? But he could not say this. For he nowhere distinguishes the delineation and the painting of a painting.⁴⁷

The point is that neither Eusebios nor Palamas was able to argue how an experience of divinity can be mediated for mankind. Such mediation – the icon, for example – was crucial for Gregoras, who believed strongly in the icon’s affirmation and memorialization of the possibility of the human perception of the Incarnate Christ. Palamas, on the other hand, focused upon the limits of human perception and sought to overcome these limits. For example, he wrote:

The light of the Lord’s Metamorphosis does not come into being or cease to be, nor is it circumscribed or perceptible to the senses, even though it was seen by human eyes for a short time on the narrow mountaintop [Thabor]. Rather, at that moment the initiated disciples of the Lord “passed,” as we have been taught, “from flesh to spirit” by the transformation of their senses, which the Spirit wrought in them, and so they saw the ineffable light, when and as much as the Holy Spirit’s power granted them to do so. Those who are not aware of this light and who now blaspheme against it think that the chosen Apostles saw the light of the Lord’s Metamorphosis with their created faculty of sight, and in this way they endeavor to bring down to the level of a created object not just that light – God’s power and kingdom – but even the power of the Holy Spirit, by which divine things are revealed to the worthy.⁴⁸

In order to overcome this limitation, Palamas argues for a transformation of human perception:

So, as I said at the beginning, God is invisible to creatures, but is not invisible to Himself. But then – O miracle! – it is God who will look, not only through the soul within us, but also through our body. This is why we will then see the divine and inaccessible light distinctly, even with our own bodily organs.⁴⁹

Palamas has nothing to say about the icon itself, for while the icon had been firmly established as a ground for orthodoxy, it had also come to embody an anthropocentric theology. Instead, Palamas returns us to the question of perception and the limits of the human senses when confronted by the divine nature.

In the very last years of Byzantium, we can hear the familiar echoes of Plato and Aristotle at play in the discussion of art found in George Gemistos Plethon’s (c. 1360–1452) *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato*. In particular, he takes issue with Aristotle’s presentation of art in the *Physics*:

⁴⁷ Gregoras, *Antirrhetika I* 313.9–14.

⁴⁸ Palamas, *Homily 34: On the Metamorphosis*, ed. p. 367; tr. p. 138.

⁴⁹ Palamas, *Defense of the Hesychast Saints*, ed. v. 1, p. 191.9–14; tr. v. 1, p. 129.

He says it is absurd to think that what happens is purposeless unless one can see the agent of it exercising deliberation. On the contrary, says Aristotle, art exercises no deliberation; for if the art were inherent in a piece of wood, it would not be deliberating. But how could an art continue to be so called if there were no deliberation prior to its exercise? What is the essential constituent of an art other than deliberation? If that were taken away, no art would remain. How could anything be carried through to an end of any kind without a mind exercising prior deliberation, and indeed preconceiving that end within itself? For if art imitates nature, as Aristotle himself holds, then nature cannot be inferior to art: on the contrary, nature must long beforehand possess that which constitutes art in an even higher degree. And even though there is clearly an element in art which does not deliberate, such as an instrument or a laborer, it is not in such things that the art lies but in the master-craftsman . . . This is not the case with Plato, either in the context we are now discussing or anywhere else. On the contrary, he distinguishes the two arts of god and man, both of which require mind. To the human art he attributes every artifact, to the divine art everything that occurs naturally. In Pindar's felicitous phrase, God may be described as the supreme artist.⁵⁰

Plethon's discussions of art and aesthetics were not extensive.⁵¹ Nonetheless, this text provides an apt conclusion to this brief introduction to Byzantine theories of art. In the waning days of Byzantium, one finds Plato brought into conversation with Aristotle as the philosopher seeks to define art in relation to human mental activity and in relation to divine creation. It reminds us of the recurrent and ancient grounds of Byzantine visual theory, in which the voices of Plato and Aristotle and their successors echo through the years. In this instance, these both bind the work of art to the human mind and revalue it, not just in terms of the imitation of divine activity, but also in relation to the continuing perception of an Incarnate God in the world. These themes had been in play throughout the many centuries of Byzantium's history, provoking a sustained, rich, and varied discourse. At the end of this chapter it is reasonable to propose that there was a concept of "art" that emerged from Byzantium and that this concept developed within and was debated by that culture.

⁵⁰ Plethon, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato*, ed. pp. 331–332; tr. in Woodhouse 1986: 202–203.

⁵¹ Mariev 2011 provides the most useful introduction to Plethon's aesthetics.

CHAPTER 9
LEGAL THOUGHT

BERNARD STOLTE

INTRODUCTION

Byzantium succeeded to a hybrid Graeco-Roman culture, in which the Greek component always was stronger and more prominent than the Latin one. Yet Roman law, for a time even in Latin, remained prominently present until and beyond the end of the empire in 1453. This remarkable fact has not drawn much attention from the historians of Byzantine culture, to put it mildly. To reflect on it has been left to the legal historians, and few among them have bothered to engage in debate with their non-legal colleagues. They in their turn have usually considered Byzantine law an uneasy subject, not helped by its technical nature. Moreover, interest in Byzantine law has been inspired more by the importance of Roman law for the formation of the western legal tradition than by it being one of the elements of Byzantine society.

The true beginnings of Byzantine law are to be found in the age of Justinian. His codification brought the development of ancient Roman law in the Mediterranean world to its conclusion and created the conditions for a separate development of Byzantine law, paradoxically by choosing the Latin language for that codification. Justinian thus maintained a link with the great Roman past of his empire, in which he considered himself to be the successor of Augustus, and even of Aeneas,¹ but the emperor of course could not entirely disregard the fact that the majority of his subjects were Greek-speaking. His subsequent legislation was therefore in Greek and the intellectual digestion of the legal tradition took place in Greek as well. Teaching Roman law in Greek was not new; it had been the norm where the language of the students made that the obvious choice, and the same held good for the courts. That Greek, however, was Greek of a peculiar kind, being interspersed with technical terms in Latin. In the manuscripts, this technical language survived until the end of the empire. All this must have contributed to set the lawyers apart even from their intellectual peers.

¹ See e.g. the prooimion of Just. Nov. 47, in which Justinian says, to use the words of the Latin version of the *Authenticum*: “nosque Aeneadae . . . vocamur.”

This chapter on the intellectual history of Byzantine law focuses on the attitude of the Byzantine jurists vis-à-vis the Justinianic heritage. Its first adaptation to the Greek milieu was not effected by the emperor himself, but by the efforts of the first generation of jurists who had to study, teach, and live with the Latin codification. It is the writings of these pioneers, the *antecessores*, that are the true beginnings of Byzantine law, and it is to their authors that we should turn our attention first. Before doing so, a word about the sources may be helpful.

Our sources are, first and foremost, the writings of the jurists themselves. The far greater part of our information about the *antecessores*, however, stems from the *Basilika* of about 900, a fact that makes a strictly chronological treatment difficult. To complicate matters further, not only the *Basilika* but in fact “almost all the works more or less generally known of Byzantium . . . are mosaics formed by texts [of the *antecessores*] arranged incessantly into new combinations.”² The history of the sources is thus complicated and several details are the subject of ongoing debate. In order to keep this contribution within bounds, I have decided to keep information about these sources³ to a minimum and to restrict myself to the jurists, concentrating on the moments in the history of the empire when they are visible to us most clearly.

JUSTINIAN’S CODIFICATION AND THE ANTECESSORES

We observe two transformations of Roman law in Justinian’s reign. The first was the compilation of two exhaustive systematic anthologies, one of imperial constitutions and another of juristic writings (the former had a precedent, the *Codex Theodosianus*, while the latter had been contemplated but not carried out). The second was the switch from Latin to Greek.

At the accession of Justinian, valid law consisted of imperial constitutions issued by his predecessors (*leges*), as well as a body of legal writing of Roman jurists (*ius*). Both could be invoked in a court of law. The older imperial constitutions had been collected in the *Codex Theodosianus* of 438,⁴ supplemented and amended by a number of laws between 438 and 527. In 529, Justinian promulgated the *Codex Justinianus*, thus updating and revising its Theodosian predecessor. Just as in the latter, the constitutions were distributed according to their subject-matter over *tituli* and arranged chronologically within each title, keeping their original date. Their legal force was subject to the maxim that *lex posterior derogat legi*

² Scheltema 1970: 1–2.

³ There is no shortage of surveys: Pieler 1978; Van der Wal and Lokin 1983; Troianos 2011.

⁴ I pass by its predecessors, the *Codices Gregorianus* and *Hermogenianus*.

priori, a younger law sets aside an older one in case of conflict.⁵ The juristic writings remained a *rudis indigestaque moles*, in the sense they had not yet been codified in the manner of the constitutions; thus their legal force remained uncertain, both in case of disagreement between different jurists and as to their relation to the imperial constitutions. As for the first problem, a crude system of rules of precedence had been established in the so-called law of citations of 426 (*CTh* 1.4.3), which, however, did not remove the uncertainty of the contents of the *ius*. The second problem did perhaps not so much present itself politically: if the emperor had spoken clearly, the judge presumably did not care very much for dissenting legal opinions. But there were many questions to which no imperial constitution could provide an answer, or contained an answer that left room for doubt and therefore for dispute. Justinian's solution was the compilation of the *Digest*, an exhaustive and systematic anthology of Roman juristic writing, promulgated as one (very long) imperial constitution in 529. The two problems were thus solved at one stroke: no text not incorporated in the *Digest* could be quoted in a court of law, and since the *Digest* formally was an imperial constitution, a potential conflict between it and an imperial constitution could be solved with the help of the *lex posterior* rule.

The promulgation of the *Digest* abolished the *ius* as an independent source of law. The source had dried up already much earlier. The vast majority of juristic writings in the *Digest* in fact date to the early third century. The jurists of the past now spoke as one with the voice of the emperor,⁶ and no new jurists were allowed to join the chorus. That voice was dated to 529. Theoretically, in an individual case, a constitution in the *Codex* of 529 could thus be set aside by a passage of the *Digest*. Furthermore, Justinian had not stopped issuing constitutions in 529. A revision of the *Codex* of 529 was called for, resulting in the *Codex repetitae praelectionis* of 534, which addressed both problems, again theoretically.

The two "anthologies," *Codex Iustinianus* (529) and *Digesta vel Pandectae* (533), between them abrogated the legal force of all preceding legislation and jurisprudential writing, which could no longer be quoted in court unless they had been included in one of the two compilations. The transmission of Roman legal texts shows that as a result other texts were no longer copied. The same fate befell Gaius' *Institutes*, a popular manual from the second half of the second century, replaced by Justinian's

⁵ *Digest* 1.4.3 (Modestinus, *De excusationibus*, book 2) = *Basilika* 2.6.5.

⁶ *Cum enim constitutionum vicem et has leges optinere censuimus quasi ex nobis promulgatas, quid amplius aut minus in quibusdam esse intellegatur, cum una dignitas, una potestas omnibus est indulta?* (const. *Tanta* 20a); cf. *in unam consonantiam reducere* (const. *Tanta* pr.). The equivalent Greek in const. *Dedoken* 20a and pr. says much the same: the emphasis is on the harmony of the legal writings once they have been promulgated by the imperial voice.

Institutes also of 533. The *Codex* of 529 had in some respects been superseded by Justinian's subsequent legislation and in particular by the *Digest* of 533, and was therefore in need of revision, which came in the form of the *Codex repetitae praelectionis* of 534. The transmission of the text of the first *Codex* was effectively brought to a halt by the need to manufacture copies of its successor. We have only a few fragments of the first Code, the most valuable of which is P.Oxy. 1814.⁷ In sum, not only were the texts of ancient Roman law formally abolished by the Justinianic codification, they were in fact consigned to oblivion.⁸

The second transformation was not so much willed by Justinian as brought about by the fact that he had codified in Latin, whereas the majority of his subjects were Greek-speaking. Soon, Greek translations and summaries replaced the Latin text, although the latter was not abolished formally, nor was a Greek authoritative version promulgated until much later. The Latin text of *Digest* and *Codex* went to sleep, only to be reawakened in northern Italy in the eleventh century, to embark upon a new career as the source of the continental civil-law tradition, whereas the various Greek versions and commentaries gave birth to an independent tradition of Byzantine law in the eastern Mediterranean, with which this chapter is concerned.

The Justinianic codification is thus a watershed: on one side, a Latin legislation with a history of a thousand years, on the other a rich source of material in Greek around which subsequent generations oriented themselves, accompanied but never overshadowed by new legislation, also in Greek, by Justinian himself and his successors. (The idea that subsequent imperial laws were formally amendments of the *Codex* of 534 was never abandoned entirely: they were named *Novellae post Codicem constitutiones*, in Greek *Nearai meta ton Kodika diataxeis*.) Bridging the watershed would have been impossible without intermediaries between the Latin past and the Greek future, and it is with them that an intellectual history of Byzantine law should begin.

The lawyers of the Justinianic age were the last generation of jurists of whom at least a few were fluent in Latin as well as in Greek. Our picture of them is clearer than of their successors in later centuries. The towering intellectual among them was Tribonian,⁹ who was in charge of the codification and wrote good classical Latin.¹⁰ Outstanding though he was, he

⁷ Corcoran 2008.

⁸ The preambles to the *Codex*, *Digest*, and *Institutes* give the "official" story and are highly informative about Justinian's intentions. They precede the standard editions and are quoted as const(itutio) followed by the first word(s).

⁹ Honoré 1978.

¹⁰ Nelson (1981: 211) is favorable to the Latin of the sixth-century jurists, when comparing the language in Justinian's and Gaius' *Institutes*.

was not an isolated figure. We know the names of many jurists who must have combined at least a good passive command of Latin and knowledge of Roman law with the ability to teach and write about that law in Greek. The teachers at the law school of Constantinople, “professors,” carried the title of *antecessor*.¹¹ We know that several of them taught before and after the codification, and some were members of the committees responsible for it. We are in the unique position of possessing both the Latin texts that were the result of the work of these committees and extensive portions of the Greek translations, summaries, and commentaries through which they made these texts available to students and lawyers. These Greek texts provide a rich source of information about the way the Byzantines understood and built upon this Roman legacy. In one case, the Greek text has reached us directly, in the form of Theophilos’ *Paraphrase of the Institutes*, a translation of Justinian’s *Institutes* interspersed with some notes.¹² In the other cases the texts have been transmitted indirectly, appended as commentaries to the *Basilika* (see below). Together these texts enable us to build a picture of the intellectual achievement of a unique period in the history of Roman law. Individual *antecessores* have been the subject of papers and monographs.¹³ Here I will restrict myself to these jurists as representatives of their profession.

First, the sixth-century *antecessores* were academic lawyers. The introductory constitutions name the advocates who had participated in the committees charged with drafting the codification,¹⁴ but we are not well informed about practicing lawyers in the sixth century apart from occasional literary references¹⁵ and what papyri tell us, and unless these are petitions to the emperor they rarely relate to what happened in the courts in the capital. Our evidence, in short, is heavily biased toward the contents of the curriculum and the teachers of the sixth-century law schools.

Second, and contrary to what has generally been held, we should expect and can in fact prove a strong continuity with the past. The impression that there should have been a sharp break has been favored by a relative dearth of information about the period between the end of the classical age of Roman law and Justinian, c. 250–527. Traditional historiography has constructed a strong opposition between Roman law and the law of the age of Justinian: as a result the latter has become a period alien to Roman law and the word “Byzantine” has given it a negative connotation, a mark of intellectual inferiority. This position was taken for centuries by

¹¹ Scheltema (1970: 3–4) explains the term and lists individual *antecessores*, with references.

¹² For details, see the edition with extensive preface, ed. Lokin et al.

¹³ Scheltema 1970 on all *antecessores* and Van der Wal 1953 on several of them; Simon 1969–1970 on Thalelaios; De Jong 2008 on Stephanos. Strictly speaking not *antecessores* but belonging to the pioneers: Brandsma 1996 on Dorotheos; Lokin-Meijering 1999 on Anatolios.

¹⁴ See, e.g., const. *Tantal Dedoken* 9. ¹⁵ E.g. the historian and poet Agathias: see below.

historians of Roman law who were convinced of the intellectual superiority of the Roman jurists of c. 100 BCE–250 CE, the period of “classical” Roman law, the very authors whose works are to be found in the *Digest*. Undoubtedly, this was the most flourishing period of Roman law as an independent intellectual activity. Several scholars, however, have been led to assume that anything in the *Digest* that seemed “unclassical” to them must *therefore* have been the result of “Byzantine” intervention, the so-called interpolations. In a free-for-all enabled by poor method in combination with a relative scarcity of relevant sources, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became an age of interpolation-criticism, a position now generally considered too extreme.¹⁶

Although there is no denying that the golden age had ended, there are enough reasons not to take a dramatic view. For a long time, established opinion had it that the intellectual tradition of the Roman jurists had died off, only to be revived briefly by Justinian, but doomed to fail by lack of a solid base in the form of a living ancient tradition. But the jurists had been incorporated into the imperial chancery and did not stop thinking or wielding influence. The form had changed, from independent legal opinion, which had been the hallmark of the classical age, into drafting rescripts and legislation. Recent scholarship has shown an increased willingness to see continuity, and is thus toning down the revolutionary aspect of the age of Justinian.¹⁷ Several *antecessores* served on the committees that prepared the codification but they had also been teaching in the preceding years. They were instructed by Justinian to select the imperial constitutions and juristic writings of the past and only change the words of the emperors and classical jurists where necessary in order to make the codification reflect sixth-century law. They could hardly have forgotten what they had taught only the year before.¹⁸

Roman law did not undergo drastic changes by its codification. To be sure, interpolations were made, but it is significant that some great reformations were made only after the codification.¹⁹ Rather, it is the outward appearance that changed, emphasized by the change of language that was to be its inevitable concomitant. The *antecessores* will not have been on unfamiliar territory when they took the new codification to their classrooms. The texts show that they pointed out differences brought about by the new legislation. But there was intellectual continuity. A core consisting of the same texts and the same concepts, found in juristic writings and

¹⁶ Lokin 1995. ¹⁷ Mantovani 2014.

¹⁸ E.g. traces of Theophilus’ course on Gaius’ *Institutes* have been discovered in his paraphrase of Justinian’s *Institutes*.

¹⁹ This is not the place to go into technical detail. See e.g. *Novels* 22 (536) and 117 (542) on marriage, and 118 (543) on succession.

imperial constitutions, the great majority of them dating to the early third century, was being handed down. Byzantine law is Roman law.²⁰

Third, despite this continuity there were also changes. The least of these was perhaps a feature much emphasized by Justinian himself. In the introductory constitution *Omnem*, directed to the *antecessores*, Justinian painted a woeful image of the shortcomings of the past, of neglect and confusion, and outlined a prospect of hope for a better future. I leave the rhetoric to one side and limit myself to what I consider here to be essential: what the emperor promises is a new law and a new curriculum. For both, however, he leans heavily on the past. What is new is above all the organization, much less so the content. The result is not an incisive break with the past, but rather a fresh start in handling a well-known heritage: Roman law.

Fourth, the greatest change of all lay in the nature of the codification, and it is the intellectual achievement of the *antecessores* to have taken it in their stride. Every codification is also a break. Existing texts not incorporated in the codification are, legally as well as in practice, abrogated by the act of promulgating the codification. Especially in the age of the handwritten book, these excluded texts literally disappear. Manuscripts are no longer copied and may be destroyed, palimpsested, or simply forgotten. More importantly, a new tapestry of texts has to be explored and explained according to the new pattern. Justinian's explicit claim that now no contradictions were to be found any longer was being taken literally.²¹ It gave rise to heroic feats of interpretation and even to a new genre in legal writing, the treatise *peri enantiophaneion*, on seeming contradictions; one jurist who flourished in the early seventh century was therefore called Enantiophanes, after the title of one of his works.²² The *antecessores* were the generation of Byzantine jurists whose exploration and systematic interpretation of the *Digest*, *Codex*, and subsequent *Novellae* created the basis of Byzantine law. For practical purposes, their texts and interpretations replaced the original Latin texts promulgated by Justinian. That they wrote in Greek precluded their influence on the Latin-speaking west, which was to face the same task some five centuries later. It should not be forgotten, however, that precisely the same *antecessores* who had drafted Justinian's codification had thus made it possible for their eleventh-century western colleagues to "rediscover" the emperor's words (see below).

Fifth, perhaps the most striking aspect of the way in which the *antecessores* explained the new legislation is the self-contained world that speaks

²⁰ Stolte 2003–2004.

²¹ Const. *TantialDedoken*, pr. and cf. 14, where the Latin version is more apodeictic than its Greek counterpart.

²² He is the same person as the so-called Younger Anonymus: Van der Wal 1980.

from their writings. The *antecessores* explained the Justinianic codification as had been intended by its originator: a universon, every part of which was in harmony with other parts and with the whole, and in which contradictions could not be real but only apparent. Most importantly, never do we read references to legislative sources outside the codification and subsequent *Novels*.²³ Customary law is mentioned rarely²⁴ and legal practice almost never.²⁵ A self-contained world, indeed.

This self-contained world is further characterized by notable anachronisms, such as the frequent phrase in the *Digest*: “*Praetor ait . . .*” The words of the *praetor* quoted in these passages are those of the Edict, in its definitive formulation by the jurist Salvius Iulianus on the orders of Hadrian after 132, in the closing years of his reign. The Edict had been a frozen text ever since. The words survive in the *Digest* because the extensive commentaries *ad edictum* by various jurists, especially Paul and Ulpian, quote them and these commentaries had been excerpted in the *Digest*. The Edict itself, however, had implicitly been relegated to oblivion by the codification. Indeed, there was hardly any need to abolish it explicitly, since it had long disappeared from legal and constitutional practice. The *praetor* of the words *Praetor ait* had little resemblance to the *praetor* of Justinian’s days.

From this example, and from the fact that the codification was in Latin, we see that the Roman past must have loomed large. It is striking that the codification is almost ignored in contemporary sources.²⁶ Just as it is clear that Justinian himself attached great weight to the enterprise, it is equally clear that the result was accepted as a matter of course. The new – and ambitious – curriculum was taught in the law schools. Teaching took place in Greek, as had been the case in the Greek-speaking world for some time.²⁷ Technical terms remained essentially Latin; they had already been incorporated into the Greek legal language by providing their Latin roots with Greek declension and conjugation.²⁸ For practical purposes, there was no new language to learn, no new legal system to master. What had been long familiar was now better organized, points of doubt had been cleared up, and the emperor had left no doubt that he not only had conquered the world *armis legibusque*,²⁹ but would govern it with the same tools.

²³ The same held good for the eleventh-century *Glossatores* in Italy.

²⁴ Simon 1985, esp. 119–125. ²⁵ A few cases in Stolte 1999. ²⁶ Rotondi 1918.

²⁷ Collinet (1925: 212) places the transition from Latin to Greek for the School of Beirut c. 400 and argues for this “révolution linguistique” as a universal phenomenon in the East. The result is well documented by the papyri. The best known example is the so-called *Fragmenta Sinaitica* (P-M³ 2286), which are the remains of a commentary on Ulpian’s *Libri ad Sabinum*. Less known is the *Dialogus Anatolii* (Berol. inv. 11866A+B = P-M³ 2277), an example of teaching on the basis of a written text. Both abound with references to classical jurists.

²⁸ As are found, e.g. in the two papyri mentioned in the previous note, and in the Paraphrase of Theophilus. For the linguistic and palaeographic features, see Van der Wal 1983 and Burgmann 1991.

²⁹ Const. *Summa*, pr.; cf. const. *Imperatoriam*, pr.

The greatest change effected by Justinian's codification seems to have been the instruction to find the law in the imperial codification only, and providing the corpus of texts in order to make this possible: the *templum iustitiae*.³⁰ For a time, at least, the jurists seem to have lived in this self-contained world.

SCHOLARS, POETS, AND LAWYERS

The self-contained world pictured in the previous section had to communicate somehow with Byzantine society in order to fulfill its function of solving conflicts and providing justice. A codification has to be applied in the courts, and lawyers were the interface between the written word and its effect on daily life. It was they who had studied the curriculum prescribed by Justinian for the law schools of Rome, Constantinople, and Berytus (Beirut, before the devastating earthquake of 551 reduced the city to rubble). Although there were students with Latin as their native language, especially in Rome, the major difficulty facing Greek-speaking students was the language of the legal sources, which remained Latin up to and including Justinian's codification. The teaching method of the *antecessores* therefore included help for Greek-speakers – we do not know about speakers of other languages – to enable them to understand the Latin text of the *Institutes*, *Digest*, and *Codex*. The standard procedure was to start with a lecture called *indix*, a Greek summary translation of the Latin text (*rhèton*), and only then, in a second lecture, to offer comments (*paragraphai*) on that Latin text. In the case of the *Codex*, whose constitutions had been written in a more complicated and sometimes tortuous Latin, a special tool was used, a translation *kata podas*, i.e. a Greek word-for-word translation written over the Latin text. In its purest form it was not even a translation, since it was only a series of Greek equivalents, each of them written over a Latin word sometimes giving more than one equivalent. Only when this *kata podas* was detached from the Latin manuscript was the series of words then refashioned into what could be called a sentence, but visibly preserving its origin as an interlinear *kata podas*. One equivalent course for Latin-speakers has been preserved as the *Authenticum*, which originates in such a Latin *kata podas* of the Greek *Novels*. This teaching method, inspired by the need to cope with linguistic problems, has been described and documented in detail by Scheltema.³¹

This, then, was how one was trained as a lawyer in the first three decades after the codification. One famous student was the historian and poet

³⁰ Const. *Tanta* 20. The metaphor does not figure in the equivalent *Dedoken* 20.

³¹ Scheltema 1970: 1–16, with detailed description of the various courses (17–60) and the end of this ambitious method, when the pretense of a Latin-based program was abandoned (61–64).

Agathias (c. 532–c. 582), who probably studied rhetoric in Alexandria before traveling to Constantinople in or soon after 551 to study law, and became a barrister.³² The end of the ambitious curriculum with its emphasis on Latin must have come after 557³³ and in all likelihood did not survive Justinian's death. It is reasonable to assume that Agathias was the pupil of one of the *antecessores* still active in the capital. Although we do not know anything of Agathias' practice, apart from the fact that he clearly preferred writing poetry and history instead, his name is worth mentioning here for various reasons. He is a typical example of the student for whom the teaching method of the *antecessores* was intended: Greek-speaking, well educated in Greek literature, perhaps first in his native town Myrina (on the Turkish coast, not far from the Greek isle of Lesbos), then in Alexandria and Constantinople, and opting for a legal career. If Agathias had not told us so himself, we would not have known that he had been a practicing barrister, a *scholastikos*.³⁴ Indeed, he was one among many, as we know from the poems collected in the *Anthologia Palatina*, which designate several poets as *scholastikoi*. From this we may deduce for Constantinople as well as for other cities in the age of Justinian the existence of a fair number of lawyers as representatives of a bilingual elite, or one at least passively bilingual. They did not all become barristers: admissions to the bars of the praetorian prefect of the east, the urban prefect of Constantinople, and the prefect of Illyricum were limited in number. Other career opportunities were an *antecessor*, a post in the imperial bureaucracy, assessor of a magistrate, delegate judge, or notary, to name a few obvious ones for which legal training was required or at least useful.³⁵ Some people may have held more than one position in succession or even concurrently. Insofar as they studied in Constantinople or Beirut, Agathias may serve as a model from which to supply lacking information as to their intellectual make-up. Other examples of men with legal training who spring to mind are John the Lydian and Prokopios, both with non-legal writings to their name. In other words, although we cannot be sure that all these people had completed the legal curriculum of a full five years, quite a few among the intellectual elite of Justinian's reign will have done so.

What had they learned in the law schools? It has to be remembered that Justinian's codification contained predominantly private law and far less criminal or administrative law. The most important compilation was the *Digest*. As a collection it was not so much a set of rules; rather it was the

³² Cameron 1970, esp. ch. 1 and Appendix B. ³³ Scheltema 1970: 62.

³⁴ The sources are in Cameron 1970.

³⁵ For details see the extensive study of Gorla 2005. After discussing the problems of defining a *giurista* (148–152), Gorla decides to include anyone who, “in possession of a more or less ample and profound knowledge of the law, makes use of it in whatever external activity” (152).

material from which to learn how to think and argue in legal terminology and concepts, and learn substantive rules at the same time. Justinian had reserved part of the first year for the *Institutes* as an elementary manual, and the rest of that year and the three following years for the *Digest*, not all its fifty books, but thirty-six of them, the *biblia prattomena*.³⁶ Of these thirty-six books, ten had to be studied independently in the fourth year, without a teacher. The fifth and final year was reserved for the *Codex*.³⁷ We may observe that *Digest* books 37–50 did not figure at all. That choice is remarkable. Not only did criminal law thus not receive attention, important parts of private law remained outside the curriculum as well. I can think of no good explanation other than the stated purpose of the curriculum. Apparently teaching the *Institutes* and roughly half of the *Digest* in a classroom was deemed sufficient to prepare the students for independent study of the remainder.³⁸ The omission of the last fourteen books, however, could hardly have been justified on the basis of their content.

It appears that the law schools closed before the end of the reign of Justinian and the law was taught after that by practicing lawyers themselves to apprentices. They were enabled to do this by the existence of Greek translations, which, while not authorized by the emperor, had taken the place of the Latin originals in instruction. Parallel to the curriculum, other tools had been provided. Dorotheos had made a full translation of the *Digest*, probably between 536 and 539.³⁹ Others had written summaries.⁴⁰ We may safely assume that toward the end of Justinian's reign for most lawyers the use of Latin had been reduced to the technical terms of the law and a few maxims, not unlike the role of Latin in the teaching of Roman law in modern universities.

This brings us back to the scholar-poet-lawyers, and their language. Poetry has its own conventions, of course, as will become clear from a glance at the poems of the *scholastikoi* in the *Greek Anthology*,⁴¹ and the comparison should be limited to prose. There is no such thing as only one taste when it came to Byzantine legal Greek. Sixth-century legal Greek could be unadorned and simple, like the Latin of the *Institutes* and *Digest*, or ornate and complicated, like the Latin of later imperial constitutions. The impression given by the explanations of the *antecessores* and other commentators of that age is that problems in understanding may have been caused by the legal complexity of a case, but hardly ever by linguistic

³⁶ In contrast to the other fourteen, the *biblia extraordinaria*. See the two brief treatises edited as Appendix I in Scheltema 1970: 64.

³⁷ Scheltema (1970: 8) gives a table with the program before and after the codification.

³⁸ As Justinian says (const. *Omnem* 5): "it will prove to be true that by studying thirty-six books they will become accomplished young men and prepared for every legal task and not unworthy of our time."

³⁹ Brandsma 1996: 8.

⁴⁰ Van der Wal and Lokin 1985: 38–51.

⁴¹ Just one example: the law is mostly indicated as *thesmoi*, a word absent from plain legal Greek.

difficulties. The *Novels*, however, might have posed a greater challenge. Where the emperor addressed his subjects, an ornate style was required, for which recourse was needed to classical models prominent in “the educational system of the Roman empire, where stress was laid exclusively on a backward-looking study and reworking of a fixed canon of the classics, with low value being attached to originality.”⁴² Where no such distancing from one’s public was necessary, or no shared appreciation of obscure allusions could be expected, i.e. where elucidation was the author’s only purpose, the use of a plain Greek was the preferred medium. Neither this plain language nor the more ornate style of the *Novels* has received much attention from professional Hellenists. Averil Cameron notes the similarity between the style of Agathias and that of “contemporary documentary papyri,” and remarks that “we should not forget that Agathias was after all a lawyer by profession.” While it is true that “much of [Agathias’] time would have been spent dealing with just this kind of business material,”⁴³ the Greek of these papyri, especially when they contained petitions to Roman authorities, shows little similarity to that of the *antecessores* who had guided the studies of our scholar-poet and his fellow students.

The Justinianic codification was an extraordinary achievement, produced in a bilingual environment. That bilingualism would live on for a short while in the law schools, where the curriculum required at least a certain passive knowledge of Latin. Lawyers earned a living in various professions, in most of which they were expected to write a Greek for which their non-legal education had prepared them and which they could employ in many variations as scholars and poets. Legal Greek continued to be written in the plain style of the *antecessores* as well as in the ornate style we meet in legislation and petitions, but later generations never reached the comprehensive grasp of Justinianic Roman law the *antecessores* aimed to inculcate in their students. One of the distinguishing features of that teaching was to see law as a coherent system in which one could move with ease among its different parts. It was that system that would be much less visible after the seventh century.

AFTER JUSTINIAN: THE PERSISTENCE OF LATIN

In the sixth century, Latin was still used by the lawyers, at least passively, although its presence was rapidly restricted to a number of technical terms for legal concepts. In that role, however, it was to be remarkably tenacious: they are found in legal manuscripts in varying density until the last centuries of the empire. Two points may be made.

⁴² Cameron 1985: 33, on the prominent features of Prokopios’ style. ⁴³ Cameron 1970: 68.

First, the existence of these Latin terms and their omnipresence in legal texts could not fail to give rise to lists as a help for the reader, and there is evidence of specialized interest in the decades running up to the compilation of the *Basilika* (see the next section). These tools could take the form of interlinear or marginal glosses, giving the Greek translation of the Latin terms; they could even replace the Latin terms when the text was copied by simple substitution of the Greek word from the gloss. The glosses could also be detached from the text and collected in lists, developing into legal lexica.⁴⁴ Some of these reveal, in their arrangement, the text from which they were originally compiled: the lexicon *adet*, so-called after its first entry, was compiled on the basis of Theophilos' *Paraphrase of the Institutes*, i.e. as a tool for better understanding that elementary textbook.⁴⁵

Second, the process of replacement of Latin with Greek is known as "exhellenisation," and the resultant Greek terms are called "exhellenisms."⁴⁶ One would perhaps expect the Greek terms at some point to have taken over entirely, but this is not the picture that emerges uniformly from the manuscripts. Latin sometimes was transliterated into Greek even when a Greek word was already known and generally accepted. Although it is stated in the preface of the *Procheiron* (c. 900) that the Latin expressions (*rhomaïkai lexeis*) have been translated into Greek,⁴⁷ that does not mean that Latin was disappearing from legal texts generally. For example, one late manuscript of Theophilos' *Paraphrase of the Institutes* dating from the fifteenth century has reasonably correctly written Latin words.⁴⁸

The compilation and circulation of these aids for the reader and the manuscript evidence testify to the need for such tools as well as the continued use, however basic, of a Latin terminology. The legal language of the Byzantines continued to show its Latin pedigree.

THE BASILIKA

It has been said above that, with the exception of Theophilos' *Paraphrase of the Institutes*, we know the work of the *antecessores* only through indirect transmission, as commentaries appended to the *Basilika*. The genesis of the *Basilika* is a complicated story, not all the details of which are clear.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For the genre, see Burgmann 1977. Examples of various lexica have been edited in Burgmann et al. 1990.

⁴⁵ Edition with introduction by Burgmann 1984. The first entry, ἀδετ· ἔχει, shows the problems of transmission and indicates the level of understanding: the original Latin lemma was *habet*.

⁴⁶ The Greek word *exhellenismos* is found in scholia on the *Basilika*.

⁴⁷ *Procheiron*, prooimion 52–53; ed. Schminck 1986.

⁴⁸ See the preface of the edition ed. Lokin et al. 2010: xxiii–xxvi; xxx.

⁴⁹ See the histories of the sources above, n. 3. The standard edition is Scheltema, Van der Wal, and Holwerda 1953–1988, and differs considerably from the older Heimbach edition. Since the latter contains a Latin translation, it is still being used. If so, it is advisable to check the respective texts,

The version that we have, or rather, of which roughly three quarters have reached us in but few manuscripts (and some parts even in just one), is in sixty books. More interesting than the text of the *Basilika* are the scholia in the manuscripts, which are witnesses to Byzantine legal scholarship. Here it is important to distinguish between so-called “old” and “new” or “young” scholia. “Old” scholia are annotations originally made to the Justinianic legislation, “new” scholia to the *Basilika* themselves.

The Greek paraphrase of Justinian’s *Institutes* has already been mentioned as the only antecessorial text that has been transmitted almost complete; only the first title and possibly a preface have been lost.⁵⁰ At first sight this seems disappointingly meagre, but there is much more in indirect transmission. The key text is the *Basilika cum scholiis*. It has to be remembered that, although the *Basilika* are dated around 900, the texts on which they draw go back to the Justinianic age. The *Basilika* are in fact a rearrangement of the Justinianic legislation, in which little or no account was taken of the fact that it was by then at least three and a half centuries old. As is explained in the various surveys of the sources of Byzantine law, the *Basilika* consolidate in *tituli* (*titloi*) the relevant passages from the *Digest*, *Codex*, and *Novels* on the same subject-matter. These they give mostly in abbreviated form, always in Greek. For the *Digest* the text follows mainly a summary made by the so-called “Older Anonymus,” a sixth-century summary that reduces the original Latin passages to what the author considered their substantive essence. A similar procedure is applied to the *Codex*, where the source mostly is Thalelaios. The *Novels* had been issued (also) in Greek and were sometimes given in full, sometimes in summary, the latter usually by Theodore.

Important as these texts are, the real treasure is hidden in the scholia. When the *Basilika* were compiled, the choice to draw on the commentaries of the Older Anonymus and Thalelaios as the basis for their text was implicitly a choice not to use the other sixth- and early seventh-century commentaries and translations available. The value of the latter, however, as additional sources of information on the text and interpretation of the Justinianic legislation, was not lost on the scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Soon, extracts from these other texts were added in the margins of the manuscripts by way of illumination of the summaries. Their interest lies in the fact that they provide information different from and frequently more detailed than the summaries used for the text of the *Basilika*.⁵¹ Sometimes we get a glimpse of debates among sixth-century

especially as the two diverge considerably, not only in their text but also in the principles of reconstruction of lost books of the *Basilika* (see Van der Wal 1988).

⁵⁰ See the preface to the edition of Lokin et al. 2010. On the Greek version of the const. *Imperatoriam* of the *Institutes*, see also Schminck 2015.

⁵¹ E.g. the commentaries of Stephanos are often more detailed.

jurists, and sometimes words or passages of the Latin originals are quoted verbatim, though the words are frequently corrupted in transmission. Greek translations from the Latin are also valuable. In the case of the *Codex*, they regularly are the so-called *kata poda* translations (see above). Apart from the fact that these are enormously helpful for modern scholars as a tool for textual criticism,⁵² they offer an insight into the translation technique and competence of the sixth-century scholars. All in all, the addition of these “old” scholia to manuscripts of the *Basilika* offers a unique window to the age of Justinian.

“New” scholia are commentaries written on the *Basilika* themselves. Therefore, they date about five centuries later than the original version of the “old” scholia. The difference in date is of course important in their valuation as witnesses of Byzantine legal scholarship. That said, it is not always easy, and is sometimes even impossible, to distinguish between the two.⁵³

The compilation of the *Basilika* is occasionally associated with a wider cultural phenomenon, the “Macedonian Renaissance.”⁵⁴ As all renaissances, the Macedonian one raises questions of what was reborn, how, and why. The key concept is *anakatharsis ton palaion nomon*, the purification of the old laws. Insofar as it makes sense to call any period in the history of Byzantine law a renaissance, it was the Justinianic legislation that was being reborn. The how of it is interesting, both for what the *Basilika* contain and what is missing from them.⁵⁵

We can easily understand why it was considered necessary to create order from the chaos. It was preferable to use one and the same Greek version of *Digest* and *Codex* in court instead of different ones. Furthermore, one appreciates the advantage consolidating the rules on one and the same subject-matter in the *Digest*, *Codex*, and *Novels* into one *titlos* (“title”) of the *Basilika*. What is less clear is why later legislation is absent. The concentration on Justinianic Roman law does not mean that there had been no room for new legislation. Justinian himself had legislated profusely after 534 on the grounds of the “variable nature of things.”⁵⁶ So had later emperors, although more sparingly, adding to the body of valid law.⁵⁷ Yet almost none of this post-Justinianic legislation is found in the *Basilika*.

⁵² Occasionally, they permit the reconstruction of variant readings in the Latin manuscripts. The humanist scholars of the Renaissance were the first to exploit this evidence systematically. See Stolte 2011.

⁵³ For guidance, see Scheltema 1957: 298–299.

⁵⁴ Pieler 1989. For a general treatment, see Treadgold 1984. The *Basilika* get one and a half lines (91) and are referred to as an unspecified “new law code compiled under Basil I and completed under Leo VI,” admittedly qualified as a “substantial achievement.”

⁵⁵ For the larger context, see Pieler 1989 and, with practical examples of the results, Fögen 1998.

⁵⁶ *varia rerum natura*: Lanata 1984.

⁵⁷ *Quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem* (*Digest* 1.4.1 pr. = *Institutes* 1.2.6). Compare the simple statement in the *Basilika* with the extensive comment in Theophilus, *Paraphrase* 1.2.6.

But what if a new law was at variance with an existing one? Standard Roman legal doctrine holds that in such a case a later law supersedes an older one.⁵⁸ Was, then, the older one “wrong”? Does it disappear by the passage of a later law? It has been noted that the Byzantines apparently did not have the same model of derogation as the Romans.⁵⁹ We may also observe, however, that neither Justinian nor the jurists of the sixth century were in doubt about that Roman model. The *Novels* of Justinian often made necessary amendments to the codification, as the emperor himself explicitly stated.⁶⁰ For example, in his summary of the *Novels* the jurist Athanasios of Emesa carefully noted at *Novel* 123 (of 546) that, “since it is of later date, it *kainizei* (‘makes new,’ ‘innovates,’ i.e. updates and replaces) all chapters of the previous one” (i.e. *Novel* 6 of 535).⁶¹ Athanasios draws for this information on the prooimion of *Novel* 123, where Justinian states that he now collects previous scattered legislation on bishops, clerics, and monks in a comprehensive law “with the apposite correction.”⁶² The composition of the *Basilika* takes this into account: it omits *Novel* 6 altogether. Indeed, in omitting also the prooimion of *Novel* 123, it tacitly suppresses information about previous legislation.⁶³ Since Justinian never collected his *Novels* into a *Codex*,⁶⁴ we do not know whether he wished to abrogate *Novel* 6 altogether. Whatever his intentions, *Novel* 6 continued to circulate in collections of the *Novels* as well as in compilations of canon law. This, however, is not all. Amendments to *Novel* 123 are found in *Novel* 137 of 565. This was noted by some scribes who amalgamated the two by substituting the latest legislation from 137 into 123, and the same happened in the version of the *Basilika* handed down to us.⁶⁵ Athanasios and others summarized *Novels* 123 and 137 in full and so did canonical compilations.⁶⁶ The *Basilika* represented the correct state of the law insofar as the relation of *Novels* 6, 123, and 137 was concerned,⁶⁷ but it omitted imperial legislation promulgated by emperors of the seventh through the ninth centuries. Thus, it seems, it was left to the lawyers and in particular to the judges to

⁵⁸ See above, n. 5. ⁵⁹ Fögen 1987; 1989; and see below.

⁶⁰ Numerous examples and their intellectual context in Lanata 1984.

⁶¹ Athanasios von Emesa, *Novellensyntagma* 1.2.1 (ad Nov. 123.1 pr.); ed. Simon-Troianos. In the first title of this work (“On bishops, clerics, monks, and monasteries”), *Novels* 6 and 123 are the first and second *Novels* respectively; *Novel* 6 thus is placed literally before 123.

⁶² *Novel* 123 pr. (Schöll-Kroll 593.25–26).

⁶³ The *Basilika* regularly seem to omit these preambles, but the lower layer of a palimpsest in Vienna (Vindob. Suppl. Gr. 200), stands out by containing them (Stolte 2010). Sometimes the substantive parts are not included *in toto*, which gave rise to disputes as to the binding force of the omitted parts.

⁶⁴ Theoretically this could have been done in the form of a third edition of the *Codex*, but it does not seem to have been envisaged. Justinian speaks of an *alia[m] congregatio[nem] . . . quae novellarum nomine constitutionum significetur* (const. *Cordi* 4).

⁶⁵ Schöll-Kroll ad Nov. 123 and 137; cf. *Basilika* 3.1. ⁶⁶ Athanasios 1.17 summarizes *Novel* 137.

⁶⁷ For other examples, see Van der Wal 1964.

apply the rule of *lex posterior*. Did they? Did they consider themselves bound to do so? Here it is instructive to look at canon law.

The sources for the canon law of the Orthodox Church, as indeed of the early Church in general, were and are first and foremost God's word as related to the beliefs and practices of the Church. In an ideal world, the Church was governed by the Bible and by the tradition reflected in the decisions of the Councils and the writings of the Fathers. This conviction formed the *corpus canonum* of the Byzantine world. By nature the written rules, *kanones*, are in accord with God's will: only when bishops are assembled in Council are they considered to be divinely inspired and authorized to lay down binding rules. The acceptance of the word of certain Fathers on a par with the canons was a later development.⁶⁸ Additional canons were supposed to explain established belief and tradition and certainly required to be still in accord with God's plan. This was not a legal system that was open to innovation.

It is not always easy to separate canon and secular law in Byzantium. Church and emperor often reserved the right to legislate on the same subject, as is especially clear from Justinian's legislation. The source may be either secular or ecclesiastical, but the two spheres were inextricably bound up. This, of course, raises the question of precedence in case of conflict, a question that was never resolved. We may note the existence of *nomokanones*, in which *kanones* and *nomoi* are found side by side, so that at least the relevant rules could be read in a convenient collection. The resolution of a possible conflict was then left to the user of such collections. The most popular of these compilations was the *Nomokanon of the Fourteen Titles*, dating to the 620s. Its secular component, the *nomoi*, was virtually Justinianic. Its second edition of 882/3 included the canons of later Councils, but as far as we can see, the *nomoi* were never updated.⁶⁹ It seems that here Justinian's legislation was held to be almost as fundamental as the canons of the early Church.

We can readily understand why the close connection with revealed truth should freeze canon law into relative immutability. God's word is not susceptible to change by human intervention, though its interpretation is of course human and therefore fallible. Therefore, the canons of the Councils were reversible in theory, although the divine inspiration under which they were supposed to have been established greatly contributed to their authority and their unchanging transmission. It is much more

⁶⁸ Concise surveys of the sources of Byzantine canon law are found in Van der Wal and Lokin 1985; Troianos 2011; for a more extensive account, see e.g. Hartmann 2012; for the *Nomokanon of the Fourteen Titles*, see Troianos 2012: 138–141.

⁶⁹ The prologue of the 882/3 revision of the *Nomokanon* claims that some legal texts (*nomikas tinas rheseis*) had been added (Rallis and Potlis 1852–1855: v. 1, 8–9), but so far it has been impossible to identify them. See Van der Wal and Lokin 1985: 89.

difficult to see why such authority should have been granted to a sixth-century emperor. As far as religious and ecclesiastical subjects were concerned, in favor of such authority one could adduce the fact that these had become part of the same tradition as the canons. But surely secular legislation on purely secular subjects could hardly claim a similar divine favor. Yet the sixth-century legislation enjoyed a status superior to that of later, non-Justinianic provenance, a situation that is to be observed for the remaining centuries of the empire. For evidence, we only have to consider the contents of our manuscripts.

What the *Basilika* did not do was recodify the law as it stood at the end of the ninth century. Part of the explanation is to be found in the nature of medieval law. It is generally held that the medieval world saw law as "perfect and established."⁷⁰ In that view, an act of legislation, even that of an emperor, was not aimed at creating perfection; rather it was intended to enunciate that perfection. It is essentially the same point of view as stated above about canon law, the difference being that canon law was based on God's plan as it had been revealed in the Bible. But not only had God's intention been revealed, in Byzantium the attribution of the source of legislative power was shifting from the emperor to God, as we find expressed in the prooimia of various law books of the eighth and ninth centuries.⁷¹ In this view the Orthodox emperor, too, enunciates God's intention, and imperial legislation is not a statement to be changed or abolished at will. All this must have contributed to corroborating the special status of the legislation of Justinian.

Even so, one cannot help wondering about the emperors whose names are associated with the compilation and promulgation of the *Basilika*, Basil I and Leo VI. Both legislated during the preparation of the *Basilika*, Leo even in great quantity. Leo took Justinian as his model, if not to surpass, then at least to emulate. In her study of the *Novels* of Leo in their relation to the *Basilika* and their reception by contemporary and later jurists, Marie Theres Fögen draws conclusions that pertain to Leo, but seem to be valid for most post-Justinianic law.⁷² Fögen analyses cases where Leo's *Novels* influenced the text of the *Basilika* and where they failed to do so. Fögen sees two mutually supplementary reasons for this. One was the non-professional standing of the emperor: Leo was not a lawyer and apparently was not aware of and therefore did not need to care about the wider implications of his legislation. The editors of the *Basilika*, in turn, did not entirely ignore the emperor's laws but were not impressed by the greater part of Leo's *Novels* that were in conflict with Justinianic law either, and so they often simply maintained the latter. This was not, Fögen argues,

⁷⁰ Pieler 1989: 61–64, esp. 63: "vollkommen und feststehend." ⁷¹ Lokin 1994: 76–80.

⁷² Fögen 1989: 33–35.

a case of insubordination by the compilers. Rather it resulted from a different understanding of legislation by the competent authority, that is, the emperor. “There are indications that the will of the emperor as *nomos empsychos* does not age and does not perish. The law books do not describe how the law had subsequently changed [down to their own time], their compilers do not ‘modernise’ it, but *select from old and new as they think fit*.”⁷³

This attitude to the development of the law of course undermines the principle of *lex posterior derogat legi priori*, indeed, one could even say it sets the rule aside. All the same, it was incorporated in the *Basilika*, and we find it again in *Hexabiblos* 1.1.31 of 1345. Perhaps significantly, it does not occur in the Isaurian *Ecloga*, *Procheiron*, *Eisagoge*, and *Epitome*, the most important smaller law books to which the next section is dedicated.

THE SMALLER LAW BOOKS

So far we have looked in some detail at the two major collections that dominate the history of Byzantine law: Justinian’s legislation (in western tradition called the *Corpus iuris civilis*) and the *Basilika*, its definitive Byzantine transformation. To the three and a half centuries between them belong a number of smaller texts, from the Isaurian *Ecloga* of 741 (“Selection”) to the *Epitome* of 913. By 913 the *Basilika* had already been promulgated, but the *Epitome* seems to have relied on earlier collections. As suggested by their names, what these law books (*Rechtsbücher* as they are called in German historiography) have in common is that they are “selections,” “manuals,” “introductions,” and “compendia.” They presuppose larger, complete collections and thus raise the question of their relation to them. We will not enter into a detailed discussion of their background. The *Ecloga*, connected with Iconoclasm, was received also outside the Byzantine empire.⁷⁴ The *Procheiron* and *Eisagoge* show considerable overlap and their dating is still disputed;⁷⁵ in any case, they are more or less contemporary with the genesis of the *Basilika*. The *Eisagoge* is perhaps the more interesting of the two as it shows the hand, or at least the inspiration, of the patriarch Photios. Its prooimion and titles two and three are probably by Photios, and a few chapters further on seem to have been written seemingly with the personal circumstances of Photios in mind. But

⁷³ *Ibid.* 34 (my translation and italics). ⁷⁴ Ed. Burgmann 1983, with preface.

⁷⁵ Schminck (1986) argues for an earlier date of the *Eisagoge*; Van Bochove (1996) defends the traditional chronology. Both views leave unanswered questions. Van Bochove (2011), while maintaining his previous position, presents an excellent survey of the *status quaestionis* with all relevant literature.

we have many more manuscripts of the *Procheiron*, which therefore seems to have been more popular. The two texts have also been combined into one compilation.⁷⁶

The contents of these law books ultimately derive largely from Justinian's legislation. Even the *Ecloga*, in the past considered a more independent, truly Christian law book, is no exception. Furthermore, with the exception of the *Epitome*, which does not contain an *intitulatio* and was attributed by Schminck to Symbatios,⁷⁷ they are not just private compilations: they are laws. Scholars have debated their status, but in the present context it may suffice to notice that the *Ecloga* and *Procheiron* were promulgated by emperors, as was the *Eisagoge*, unless it remained a draft law, but even then it was intended to receive imperial promulgation.⁷⁸ That fact makes the question of their relation to the larger collection yet more interesting. It is inconceivable that any of them should have abrogated the underlying legislation, i.e. Justinian's as well as the later *Novels*. The simplest solution has been advanced by Scheltema: the Justinianic legislation was treated as teaching material, the law books represented the law actually reigning in practice. As has been said elsewhere in a more extensive report on the *status quaestionis*, that "may be part of the explanation; it is not the entire explanation."⁷⁹

Obviously, the selection of topics in each of the law books is interesting in that it shows what was considered relevant. No doubt these shorter compilations give a much more realistic picture of Byzantine "law-in-action," but this does not mean that legal practice did not have recourse to texts not in these law books. On the contrary, it freely quoted from Greek versions of Justinian's law and later from the *Basilika*, but also seemed to follow rules or customs unknown to any of the "official" collections.⁸⁰ And it should not be forgotten that emperors continued to legislate.

The debate among modern legal historians continues regarding the nature and relation of all these statements of the law that were produced within a relatively short period. Perhaps their worries are anachronistic and superfluous, since the Byzantine lawyers seem unbothered. Given the dissemination of the law books, their reception into other languages, and the scarcity of manuscripts of the *Basilika*, there can be little doubt about what texts legal practice preferred.

⁷⁶ For details, see the histories of the sources above, n. 3. ⁷⁷ Schminck 1986: 128–131.

⁷⁸ The view that it remained a draft law was taken originally by Zachariä von Lingenthal and is developed by Signes Codoñer and Andrés Santos 2007, summarized by Van Bochove 2011: 252–254.

⁷⁹ This includes the problem of status and purpose of the Farmer's Law, the Seaman's Law and the Military Law: Stolte 2005: 68–70.

⁸⁰ This inspired Kazhdan 1989 and the subsequent discussion.

THE JURISTS RESURFACE: THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH
CENTURIES

At the turn of the first millennium, the normative legal texts had taken their definitive form. The unwieldy mass of the *Basilika*, available for a century, had gradually been provided with marginal comments in the form of selected passages taken from the sixth-century writings of the *antecessores* (the “old scholia”). Together they may be considered a summation of Justinianic legislation. A number of shorter law books provided easier access. A sixth-century student manual, Theophilus’ *Paraphrase of the Institutes*, was still circulating.⁸¹ The contents of the *corpus canonum* of the Orthodox Church was stable since the 882/3 revision of the *Nomokanon of the Fourteen Titles*. As for non-normative texts of a legal nature, we are mostly groping in the dark. Occasional glimpses are afforded in marginal notes in manuscripts, but no collections of cases and no direct reporting from the classroom such as the writings of the *antecessores* have been handed down. Teaching must have taken place in some form, delivered and controlled by the legal profession: the *Book of the Eparch* (c. 900),⁸² beginning with a title on notaries (*taboullarioi*), mentions a *paidodidaskalos* and a *didaskalos* (1.13), which presupposes an organized form of teaching by the corporation of notaries. How all the secular and canonical norms were digested, explained, and applied – or not! – has to be inferred from information scattered in non-legal texts of the most varied nature.

All this changes by the middle of the eleventh century. The starting point is a draft *Novel* of c. 1045, its text written by John Mauropous for Constantine IX Monomachos.⁸³ It provided the means, a location, and a library for a law school, to be directed by John Xiphilinos (the later patriarch) as *nomophylax*. It is not clear whether the foundation, or resurrection, of a law school made legal education independent from general education, nor can we be certain that it took such teaching out of the hands of the legal profession. We are also unsure how long the school survived, but we may at least connect it with the emergence of the “new scholia” on the *Basilika*. These are found in our manuscripts, frequently inscribed with the name of their author.⁸⁴ One of them is John Xiphilinos, i.e. the *nomophylax* himself, and others include Constantine of Nicaea, Kalokyros Sextos,⁸⁵ Gregory Doxopatres, and Hagiotheodorites. Taken together,

⁸¹ It is worth noting that it had not been excerpted systematically for the *Basilika*, but if there are references to the *Institutes*, they are mostly to Theophilus.

⁸² Scholars are not unanimous about its precise dating: see *ODB* s.v. *Book of the Eparch*.

⁸³ Text in *Jus Graecoromanum*, v. 1, 618–627; the date has been much discussed. For an extensive treatment, see Wolska-Conus 1976b and 1979; Van der Wal and Lokin 1985: 98–99 and 135; and Troianos 2011: 216–217 and 236.

⁸⁴ Van der Wal and Lokin 1985: 100, 135. ⁸⁵ Burgmann 1989.

they allow us to gain an impression of the interpretation of the *Basilika* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This evidence of scholarship can be supplemented by a number of independently transmitted treatises, most of them anonymous or at least of uncertain attribution.⁸⁶ Together these texts show the Byzantines' capability of intellectually handling the *Basilika*. But what about legal practice?

A name that looms large in the eleventh century is that of Eustathios Romaïos. He was the author of learned treatises, some of confirmed authorship, others by attribution, but he is best known as a judge of the Court of the Hippodrome in Constantinople, on the basis of whose judgments the so-called *Peira* was compiled.⁸⁷ We must not blame Eustathios himself for the way the cases are reported, but the treatise is invaluable for the light it sheds on eleventh-century legal practice. Dieter Simon has studied the *Peira* to understand how the law was "found" in the highest law court of Byzantium.⁸⁸ His verdict is not flattering: "fehlende Dogmatik" and "totale Kasuistik" are prominent. The laws of rhetoric seem to carry greater weight than those of Justinian and his successors. That is not to say that the reported decisions were unjust or not equitable in the case at hand; besides, we usually have insufficient information about the details of a case to admit of such conclusions. Simon is concerned with the way these decisions were reached. Quotations from the *Basilika* regularly occur, but they lack a clear place within a theoretically coherent whole, which in turn would help to predict the outcome of future cases. In short, we meet an application of law divorced from *Rechtswissenschaft*, legal scholarship, such as we find in the classical Roman jurists and again among the best of the Italian medieval jurists. The scarcity of collections similar to the *Peira* should caution us against overhasty and wholesale conclusions about Byzantine law. Yet it is difficult to avoid linking the *Peira* with what has been observed recently about ancient Greek law: "to put it very pointedly, a law without lawyers."⁸⁹ Another association is with the ancient Roman distinction between *jurisperiti* and *oratores*. One often cannot help seeing in the *Peira* more of the latter than the former.

The contrast between the huge mass of the *Basilika* and its selective use in the *Peira* is given some relief by a number of attempts to come to grips with the sheer amount of material. Two examples suffice. The first, the *Synopsis Basilicorum maior*, predates the (re)foundation of the law school; it is an alphabetic rearrangement of the *Basilika* according to the keywords of their subject-matter. Sale, for example, has been put under A (*agorasia*). In the manuscripts it is often accompanied by variously composed appendices containing imperial *Novels* and other legal matter.⁹⁰ The other, the

⁸⁶ For details see the histories of the sources above, n. 3. ⁸⁷ Oikonomides 1986.

⁸⁸ Simon 1973. ⁸⁹ Zimmermann 2015: 461, citing Thür 2003. ⁹⁰ Svoronos 1964.

Tipoukeitos, is a repertory literally providing information about “what is where.” It follows the *ordo librorum* of the *Basilika* and allows the user to “scan” the contents more rapidly than would have been possible from the full text. A different approach again is the *Ecloga Basilicorum*.⁹¹ As suggested by its name, it is an abstract from the *Basilika*, of which we have only the first ten books. Its additional value lies in a commentary, dating to the mid-twelfth century,⁹² which regularly comments on actual or imaginary cases, thus adding to the scarce information about contemporary legal practice.

Two names must not be overlooked here: Michael Attaliates and Michael Psellos. Neither was first and foremost a jurist. Attaliates was a judge and historian, and the polymath Psellos more a philosopher than a lawyer. They follow, as it were, in the footsteps of the sixth-century scholar-poet-lawyers such as Agathias, and no doubt had the same broad education and interests. Indeed, Psellos taught philosophy as a colleague of John Xiphilinos.⁹³ Attaliates wrote a *Ponema nomikon* (“legal work”, c. 1073/4),⁹⁴ an accessible text consisting of, first, a historical introduction and a systematic treatment of “persons,” “things,” and “orthodoxy,” followed by an extract from the *Basilika*. The work was even meant for *oligogrammatoi*, if we may trust the preface, a claim which says something about the level of people who were in his eyes “barely literate.” Another explanation could be that legal language was simply not to the cultivated taste of the intellectuals of the period and its users therefore were considered to be “men of few letters.” Psellos’ is a different case. For all his learning and fame as rhetor, historian, and teacher of the future emperor Michael VII Doukas, he is not given much credit for his legal writings. For him he wrote a unique work, the *Synopsis legum*, a didactic poem mostly aiming at explaining Latin legal terminology; in addition, he wrote a few shorter treatises.⁹⁵

The twelfth century is the age of the canonists. Three names stand out: Alexios Aristenos, John Zonaras, and Theodore Balsamon. All three composed a commentary on the corpus of canons of the Orthodox Church, but with a different approach.⁹⁶ Aristenos (c. 1130) based himself on a summary of the canons (*Synopsis canonum*). Zonaras (1050s), the best lawyer of the three who was active in other fields as well and is probably best known for his chronicle, used their full text. Balsamon, the youngest, is interesting because he commented not only on the canons proper, but also on the *Fourteen Titles* (the systematic part of the *Syntagma canonum*) as extended with *nomoi*. In other words, one finds in him concerns rarely if ever touched upon by the

⁹¹ Burgmann 1988. ⁹² *Ibid.* xvi–xvii. ⁹³ Wolska-Conus 1976b and 1979; Martino 2002.

⁹⁴ Text in *Jus Graecoromanum*, v. 7, 409–497.

⁹⁵ Pieler 1978: 464–465; Weiss 1977, with the text of the *Synopsis legum*. See also the analysis by Fögen 1982.

⁹⁶ Most accessible in Rallis and Potlis 1852–1855, v. 2–4; see also the papers in Oikonomides 1991.

other two. First, there is the relation between *canones* and *nomoi* and the binding force of *nomoi*, especially of those that had been part of Justinian's legislation but had not been incorporated in the *Basilika*. In addition, he quotes many patriarchal decrees and imperial laws of more recent date, for which he is regularly our only source. One could say that his attention to case law connects his commentary to actual practice. These commentaries demonstrate a willingness on the part of the canonists to look systematically at the established law as a whole or at separate parts thereof. Zonaras and Balsamon especially prove to be professional lawyers: they work within the legal domain with legal not rhetorical or literary tools.

The revival of legal scholarship in the mid-eleventh century cannot fail to raise questions about the similar one in northern Italy. It is of course tempting to see mutual influence, of which, however, no trace has so far been found. On the contrary, as we shall see in the next section, east and west went their separate ways. The comparison brings out an illuminating contrast and may also serve as a conclusion of this chapter.

EAST AND WEST

A comparison of the fortunes of Roman law in the eastern Byzantine and western Latin traditions brings to light fundamental differences. At first sight, the legal position of the Justinianic legislation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Italy and in Byzantium is very similar. In both parts of the medieval world it is being copied, studied, and provided with marginal glosses by way of comment. It enjoys authority and we see it being connected with canon law and making appearances in court. In short, it is there to be used, but the difference lies in the uses to which it is being put.

As we have seen, the codification first needed to be understood and taught. The results of that process have reached us in the form of marginal annotations in the manuscripts. Whereas it is true that both in sixth-century Constantinople and in eleventh-century Bologna the *Codex* and *Digest* were explained as if there was nothing outside the Justinianic legislation, it would be a mistake to think that the Italian jurists believed that to be the case. First, they had to confront the intellectual challenge of coming to terms with a huge body of difficult texts before its relation with the existing laws of local and regional origin could be tackled. The latter were never forgotten. Roman law became prominent only after customs and statutes had shaped various legal systems, into which the "new" law had to be integrated. In the hierarchical order, the local law always came first. In a possible conflict between local law and Roman law, it was possible that the position of the emperor in the western world would be brought into play. It was not even always the case that the emperor would identify himself with Roman law: he might be more interested in creating

new law with the help of the privileged position accorded to the emperor in Roman law.

Obviously, all this was different in Byzantium. There, Roman law was not a (relative) newcomer. To the contrary, it had always been the law of the land and its prestige was indisputable. It was imperial law and the emperor held the monopoly of legislation. There could be no question of local custom or statutes having precedence except by permission of the emperor. Even a theoretical debate on this matter was impossible. (Practice could be, and was, different.) The marginal annotations in the Latin manuscripts are witnesses of such a discussion,⁹⁷ which is conspicuous for its absence in the Byzantine codices. Elsewhere I have described the difference between Byzantium and the western world in this respect as the difference between an heir and a legatee.⁹⁸ Byzantium was the *heres necessarius* of Roman law. Constantinople was the New Rome and was simply unable to escape the consequences of that position. It received Roman law with all its *activa* and *passiva*, its assets and debts. But in the various cities and regions of the Latin west, where it often had never been entirely absent, Roman law was received with greater or lesser enthusiasm, a *legatum* unburdened by liabilities, to be used or dismissed as irrelevant according to local political and cultural conditions.

Outside the Byzantine empire, cities and states were thus free to use Roman law according to their own needs and inclination. This led to the *ius commune*, a learned amalgam of Roman and canon law that was taught in the late medieval universities throughout Europe and made it possible for their students to practice everywhere, on condition they mastered the local law of the place where they chose to settle. Roman law served to fill the lacunae in local law and, more importantly, provided the legal concepts and terminology to describe local rules. The same happened with feudal law, which even became a separate section within the *Corpus iuris civilis*. Western learned jurists were aware of the differences that existed from place to place and, steeped in Roman law, were able to describe them and resolve the difficulties they created. They built with the building-blocks they found in Roman law, and the reproach that the resulting structures were no longer the Roman law of classical antiquity or Justinian, a reproach heard with increasing frequency in the age of humanism, is in fact evidence that they were not the prisoners of Roman law.

The Byzantine jurists were in an entirely different position. These *heredes necessarii* were unable to refuse the inheritance of Roman law. To do so would be tantamount to rebellion against the emperor. In order to make room for non-Roman rules and concepts, it was not enough to state that in this case Roman law was not binding, since the validity of an alternative lacked an acceptable foundation. It could be argued on the basis of an

⁹⁷ E.g. Ryan 2015. ⁹⁸ Stolte 2014: 73–74.

interpretation of *Digest* 1.3.32 (*Basilika* 2.1.41) that a law could be abrogated by *non usus*, but if an explicit norm was found in Roman law, the simple answer of “we do things differently” could be problematic. But the greatest obstacle to building a new legal system (as was being done in the late medieval west) was the absence from the Byzantine world of a legal system that had an equally valid claim as imperial Roman law.

This unchallenged position does not mean that this state of affairs met with universal satisfaction. Roman law did not yield to the pressure of an alternative, but was not up to playing the role of omniscient counselor, either. For practical needs, different strategies were being devised. First, the unwieldy size of the *Basilika* made more compendious law books an attractive alternative, and these survive in far greater numbers than the collection on which they are based. It is dangerous to draw firm conclusions from a comparison of the numbers of extant manuscripts of Latin *corpora iuris* and Greek *Basilika*, but the evidence is so overwhelmingly in favor of the former that surely we may assume their far more intensive use, as is also evidenced in the huge numbers of early modern printed editions. In Byzantium, the selection and omission of *Basilika* passages in these smaller law books tell their own story. The Isaurian *Ecloga* and the *Procheiron*, and later the *Hexabiblos*,⁹⁹ have reached our days in numbers that permit us to infer that they answered a real need.

A second difference may be discerned in the evidence stemming from the practical application of Byzantine law. The *Peira* (discussed in the previous section) provides evidence of a different position of the “written law.” True, the latter enjoyed huge prestige, but it was only one of the factors to be taken into consideration by the judge, and even so not as a coherent, systematic whole. That does not mean that the outcome of a legal case would be different from a similar one in the west, but the intellectual route toward that outcome certainly would.

If we look at law as an intellectual pursuit, the greatest difference between east and west is that in Byzantium law never was an independent, self-sufficient field as it became in the late Middle Ages in the west. Once universities had been founded in northern Italy and later in all of Europe, their faculties of civil and canon law produced lawyers who had internalized the terminology and concepts of Justinianic Roman law. With these tools they were able to find their way among competing legal systems and address the legal questions of their own time. They formed a prestigious legal profession, in which Thalelaios or Athanasios would have felt at home, but Psellos would have been strangely out of place.

⁹⁹ The *Hexabiblos* (Thessalonike, 1345) was a very successful compilation on the basis of existing texts such as the *Synopsis Basilicorum maior*. It remained a standard manual of Byzantine law until much later, and for a time even the Code of Law of the Kingdom of Greece after independence.

PART III
SCIENCES OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER 10

CONCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE IN BYZANTIUM

DOMINIC O'MEARA

The term “science” can cover a variety of conceptions which change over time and relate in constantly fluctuating ways to the landscape of human skills, expertises, and forms of knowledge, a landscape which itself is constantly developing and changing. We will be concerned here not with particular branches of knowledge, particular “sciences” such as mathematics, but with the normative concept of “science,” i.e. a concept that includes norms which we identify as needing to be satisfied if a particular branch of investigation or knowledge is or is not to be considered a “science” or as “scientific.” Thus, applying norms that prevail today, we might say that astronomy is “science” but astrology is not. The *determination* of the norms themselves is the object of constant discussion and negotiation by researchers, by the managers of scientific policy, and by philosophers of science, and may diverge from what the general public recognizes as “scientific.” Furthermore, the *application* of these norms is also the object of constant debate and negotiation: Are the social sciences “sciences”? Is economics a “science”? Or psychology?

Modern conceptions of “science” differ very much from those which prevailed from antiquity up to the early modern period. Indeed we could say that European intellectual history has been dominated in the past by an “Aristotelian” conception of science according to which the natural sciences (which serve today as paradigms of what “science” is) could still be described in the eighteenth century as branches of philosophy, subordinated to the highest branch, metaphysics, whose erstwhile supremacy was by that time (as Immanuel Kant lamented) not only no longer contested but, worse still, ignored. This “Aristotelian” conception of science involved norms very different from those which characterize the conception of science of today. I write “Aristotelian” because, although this conception has its roots in Aristotle’s work, it evolved in various ways in antiquity and the Middle Ages under the influence of other concerns, circumstances, and sources of inspiration. I will first sketch this “Aristotelian” conception of science, as it was understood in late antiquity and transmitted to intellectuals of the early Byzantine period. I will then take some figures from later periods of Byzantine history, from the eleventh

and twelfth centuries and then from the Palaiologan period of the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century, in order to indicate various ways in which they used, adapted, and even rejected the ancient conception of science.

CONCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY
BYZANTIUM

The word “science” derives from the Latin *scientia*, which itself translates, in Cicero for example, the Greek word *episteme*. Aristotle stipulates what he means by *episteme* when he describes, in the famous introduction to his *Metaphysics* (I.1–2), how the human desire to know developed over time, from the experience of things given in sense-perception, through the accumulation of this experience to form certain practical skills, expertises, and arts, toward the emergence of a scientific form of knowledge, *episteme*. What separates science from lower forms of knowledge is that it concerns truths of general application rather than particulars, and that it is able to explain phenomena by referring to explanatory factors, to the causes of these phenomena. In this picture of the development of knowledge, science emerges as its culmination, its highest point. The most scientific of forms of knowledge must then be a knowledge which fulfills most the criteria of generality and explanatory power. This would be a universal knowledge, reaching the ultimate causes of everything. Such a knowledge would be metaphysics, the science of being in general or “first philosophy” as Aristotle calls it, a “theology” in the sense that it deals with divine, transcendent beings that are the primary causes of everything. Other characteristics of science that Aristotle mentions elsewhere (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.3 and 6.6) are its grasp of truths that are necessary and eternal and the norm of finality (mentioned in *Metaphysics* 1,2): science is its own goal; it is not sought for the purposes of material utility or benefit, as in the case of lower skills and arts. Indeed, it would seem that the highest knowledge is the ultimate goal of human desire, a happiness that we might sometimes attain. The norm of finality shows how far we are from common modern conceptions of science which assume that some material benefit must be the goal motivating and legitimizing scientific research.

If there is an ultimate science such as metaphysics, then, in Aristotle’s gradualist picture, there are also lower forms of knowledge that meet the norms of science, albeit to a lesser degree. We can indeed piece together from Aristotle’s work a hierarchy of the sciences going down from metaphysics to mathematics and physics (the “theoretical” sciences, or philosophy whose goal is *theoria*, knowledge) to the practical sciences and productive arts (ethical and political science, whose goal is action, *praxis*,

and manufacturing arts whose goal is production, *poiesis*). This hierarchy was common in the philosophical schools of late antiquity, where, however, the highest science, metaphysics, was understood as bearing on ultimate causes which included transcendent Platonic Forms. These schools, which were Platonist in inspiration, also believed that if a scientific knowledge of transcendent divinity could be elaborated, this achievement needed to be surpassed in a union of the human soul, beyond knowledge, with the divine. The schools also understood the necessary and eternal truths of Aristotelian science as being such because they characterized the knowledge of transcendent eternal immaterial realities. Knowledge in the strong sense, “science,” is the infallible grasp of these realities. This knowledge cannot be derived from sense-experience; the possibility of access to it was explained by its being already present, innate in soul, requiring articulation according to rigorous logical method.¹ Since, in these Platonists’ view, everything, including every level of material reality, derives its existence and structure from transcendent causes, so also do the forms of knowledge that we have of lower levels of reality derive what is “scientific” in them from science of the transcendent.

When Christian intellectuals in late antiquity began to defend their faith, explain it, and reflect upon it, they tended, in some cases, to see their religion as a “philosophy” that could successfully respond to the human quest for knowledge and provide the way to the good life sought by philosophers. Seen as the best or as the only “true” philosophy, the Christian religion could thus be understood, in light of ancient conceptions of philosophy and science, as promising the highest science, the ultimate goal of the human striving for knowledge, in the form of the vision of God. Such Christian intellectuals could also allow that God revealed knowledge to humanity, not only in the unique privileged revelation given in the Bible, His Word, but also, to an inferior and imperfect extent, in men’s souls and in the world, such that pagan philosophers could discover some truths, even if inadequately. An appropriate scriptural quotation in this regard was James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Pagan philosophy and science could contain some good and thus be of use to Christians, as a preparation for access to Christian knowledge and as an instrument for refuting pagan criticisms of Christian belief and heretical versions of this belief. Other Christian intellectuals emphasized the contrast between Christian belief and pagan science: Christian belief was “foolishness” in comparison with the wisdom of the Greeks, the wisdom of the world (Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:17–25 and 3:18–19), a foolishness that replaced pagan wisdom

¹ For a survey, see O’Meara 2012a.

which consequently became, at best, redundant, or at worst a corrupting and evil influence. In this perspective, the Christian believer would have no need of a pagan “science” developed by humans on the basis of experience and rigorous logical reasoning; the believer had something far superior, the knowledge revealed by God.

The tension between these two trends – the continuity between science and Christian belief and the contradiction between science and Christian belief – permeates the intellectual history of Byzantium and we will observe a range of positions between two extremes, the assimilation of philosophy and science to Christian religion and the radical rejection of anything having to do with pagan philosophy and science, as well as the extremes themselves, in different intellectuals responding to different circumstances and pressures. An early Byzantine example might be provided by the work of John of Damascus, an eighth-century theologian who, though living under Arab rule, wrote works that would be influential in Byzantine intellectual history. His philosophical handbook, the *Dialectika*, provides an elementary summary of the basic concepts of logic, physics, and metaphysics, such as had been taught in the Platonist school of Alexandria in the fifth and sixth centuries. Just like his Alexandrian sources, in the opening chapters John defines philosophy as the knowledge (*gnosis*) of beings (ch. 3). There is nothing higher for humans than the true knowledge of beings, which John also calls “science,” *episteme* (ch. 1). It is the light of the rational soul that distinguishes humans from animals, it is infallible and a source of all expertise and scientific knowledge (ch. 3). In his prologue, John defends this recourse to philosophy by quoting James 1:17 and by saying that he will select from pagan philosophy what is useful to the Christian and reject what is false, while insisting that Christ is subsistent truth and wisdom, a wisdom we learn from the sacred Scriptures. The affirmation of the primacy and superiority of Christian revelation, the claim to make selective use of knowledge found in pagan philosophy and science as having some good use: these stipulations are fairly standard, but they provide some authority for a limited recourse to knowledge outside the realm of divine revelation. And we also notice that John sees the goal of the Christian as the highest knowledge, the knowledge brought by the vision of God.

MICHAEL PSELLOS AND HIS SCHOOL

A fairly continuous tradition of teaching the sciences, as parts of philosophy, can be observed in the early Byzantine period, in the wake of the curriculum followed in the Platonist school of Alexandria. Instruction was somewhat elementary and concerned mostly the first stages in the curriculum: logic, perhaps some mathematics, and sometimes a little ethics and

physics. An example of this tradition is provided by a handbook dated to 1007 and known as the *Anonymous Heiberg*, which summarizes logic, arithmetic, harmonics, geometry, and astronomy based on the corresponding texts of Aristotle, Nikomachos of Gerasa, Euclid, and Ptolemy.² Later in the eleventh century, Michael Psellos appears to have followed such a curriculum, but he went much further, thanks to his extensive and enthusiastic study of ancient manuscripts, covering the full extent of the Platonist curriculum of late antiquity. Psellos describes his study as follows:

Starting from these authors [i.e. Plato and Aristotle] I completed a cycle, so to speak, by coming down to Plotinos, Porphyry, and Iamblichos. Then, continuing my voyage, I put in at the mighty harbor of the admirable Proklos, eagerly picking up there all science (*episteme*) and precision of concepts. From there, intending to ascend to first philosophy [i.e. metaphysics] and to be initiated into pure science (*episteme*), I first acquired the knowledge of incorporeal realities in what are called mathematics.³

Psellos then mentions a wisdom that is above demonstration, i.e. above science, which he found mentioned by the more perfect philosophers. He appears to be referring here to the late antique Platonist theory that there is a non-discursive grasp by intellect (*nous*) of truths above the discursive knowledge elaborated by science through reasoning processes. He read some works on this subject, but does not claim to have achieved accurate knowledge on this level. He then mentions, a little later (6.42) a new “philosophy” superior to the ancient, that of Christianity, to which he devoted his studies, reading extensively the works of the Church Fathers and contributing to the study of them.

Such was Psellos’ learning in philosophy, the sciences, theology, rhetoric, and many other branches of learning that he was able to make for himself a place at the imperial court in Constantinople, where he occupied an official function responsible for the teaching of philosophy. His little encyclopedia *De omniafaria doctrina* reflects this teaching and contains a short chapter on the difference between types of knowledge which is relevant to his conception of science:

The first and highest of all [kinds of] knowledge (*gnosis*) is that of fore-knowledge (*pronoia*), which is the activity of God. For God, being above all beings and having a power above intellect itself and being one, in the proper sense, by means of unity alone, is said to fore-know all things. The second kind of knowledge is the intellectual knowledge belonging to the universal intellect (*nous*) which thinks all things wholly. The third [kind of] knowledge coming after this is that belonging to our rational soul, which is divided into opinion (*doxa*) and science

² Heiberg 1929. ³ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.38 (tr. Sewter, modified).

(*episteme*): opinion is knowledge of things which move or change, science is of the immutable, such as soul, intellect and the like.⁴

Psellos is summarizing here a text by Proklos, but the theory corresponds with the way in which he describes his own view of knowledge in the *Chronographia*: science is knowledge concerning immaterial immutable realities; it involves discursivity, rigorous methods of reasoning such as can be found in mathematics; it is surpassed by a form of knowledge superior to science, a non-discursive grasp of truths by intellect.⁵ Psellos suggests in the *Chronographia* that humans might have access to this non-discursive knowledge, but his attitude is somewhat reserved. And he also insists on the superiority of Christian revelation in relation to pagan wisdom.

This position is reflected in texts where Psellos reproduces the doctrines of the pagan philosophers of antiquity. A tactic he frequently adopts is to refer to Christian Orthodox doctrine as the standard, the criterion, in relation to which pagan doctrines may be judged true or false. However, such is Psellos' fascination with the ancient philosophers, and particularly with Proklos, that there seems to be an uneasy balance between his maintaining the primacy of Christian revelation and doctrine and his extensive presentation of a pagan philosophy that he had assimilated so deeply in his mind. The ancient conception of the kinds of knowledge, their value and nature, in particular as found in Proklos, seems to act as a guiding light in Psellos' mind.

His successor in the teaching of philosophy, John Italos, seems to have continued along the same lines, but we have much less written evidence of his work. The collection of "Puzzles and Solutions" published under the title *Quaestiones quodlibetales* shows a difference in Italos' philosophical style in comparison with that of Psellos: less emphasis on erudition and a greater emphasis on argumentation. The first puzzle of the collection concerns one of the traditional definitions of philosophy derived from the late antique Alexandrian school and often repeated in the early Byzantine period, that of philosophy defined as the "art (*techne*) of arts and the science (*episteme*) of sciences." This definition, Italos tells us, is a puzzle for philosophers, because "they believe that science is something different from art, and that the one, science, relates to an infallible subject-matter, whereas the other, art, is not so." Italos gives the following solution to this puzzle:

To these philosophers one should say that not all that which is said to be something, is simply that something [i.e. without qualification] . . . but something can

⁴ Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina* 94; cf. Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, text no. 49.15–21 for the distinction between *techne* and *episteme*.

⁵ See Chapter 26.

be said by anticipation and according to [its] cause, another can be said according to its existence and essence, another according to participation . . . thus, if we say that [art] is philosophy, we do not say that this is according to the existence [of art] but rather according to its cause [i.e. philosophy]. But this [philosophy] is not what art is, in its essence, but it is something better and truer. But if you want to know how the cause can be truer than the things which come from it, I will tell you. Indeed it is very probably so, since it is something else and the difference is according to the better and the worse. But you would not agree that what is caused is better than that from which it comes. Thus philosophy is better than those things [arts] which come from it.⁶

Italos' source of inspiration here is Proklos.⁷ The solution Italos gives to the puzzle implies that philosophy is primarily science – the highest science, we suppose – which is the truest knowledge and the source of other subordinate forms of knowledge, lower sciences and arts. The second puzzle in the collection explains this in more detail: philosophy is the science of sciences, as the cause of other sciences, in the sense that it deals with pure being and with the cause from which pure being flows, the first cause of all things, the One (or the Good). Other subordinate sciences derive their “starting points” from philosophy as the highest science.⁸ This highest science, we can see, is metaphysics, and Italos probably means that subordinate sciences derive their starting points from it in the sense that they derive their axioms from it and elaborate their demonstrations from these axioms. Italos therefore adopts an Aristotelian conception of the hierarchy of sciences, which he relates to a structure of reality evoking that of late antique Platonism. The same late antique, “Aristotelian,” conception of science can be found in a later passage (puzzle no. 29) of Italos' work, where science is defined thus:

Science (*episteme*) is the infallible grasp of its subject-matter. This definition fits the four mathematical sciences and philosophy. Here is another definition: it is what deals with causes; this definition fits philosophy only. And here is another: it is what uses in order its parts; with this definition, science is predicated of grammar and rhetoric, as predicated of the subject-matter.

As is well known, Italos was silenced by an ecclesiastical condemnation in 1082.⁹ As for what is denounced in the condemnation – many doctrines are condemned which have no particular relevance to Italos, but derive from the stock-in-trade of theological polemic with pagan wisdom – one might note that those persons are condemned who not only teach pagan philosophical doctrines, but also adopt them. Psellos claimed merely to educate his pupils in pagan lore, informing them while warning them

⁶ Italos, *Quaestiones quodlibetales* 1. ⁷ Proklos, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 65.

⁸ See Psellos, *Oratoria minora* 37.210–220. ⁹ See Chapter 27.

against accepting what was false according to Christian teaching. But the line was fine between the extensive and enthusiastic teaching of ancient philosophy and the appearance of adopting it. The condemnation of Italos also expressed a strong rejection of the use of philosophical ideas and methods in the discussion of questions in Christian theology.

Both Italos and his pupils were the targets of the condemnation of 1082. Eustratios of Nicaea, one of Italos' pupils, escaped the condemnation, only to suffer a later condemnation, in 1117. Italos' successor as teacher of philosophy, Theodore of Smyrna, does not seem to have been affected, but his teaching, as far as we can see, continued along the lines of the teaching offered by Psellos and Italos. Eustratios, whose successful ecclesiastical career was ended by the condemnation of 1117, later appears as a commentator on Aristotle, who seems to have collaborated with Michael of Ephesos in this work, probably sponsored by the princess Anna Komnene, herself forced for political reasons into studious retirement.

Eustratios' *Commentary* on books 1 and 6 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides us with some glimpses of how he understood the nature and purpose of science. In explaining Aristotle's description (in book 6.3) of "science" as dealing with eternal and necessary truths, Eustratios relates this to the Platonic distinction between eternal, unchanging, and immaterial being, the Forms, and generated, changing material things. The science of eternal being is metaphysics, first philosophy, and it also deals with first causes of beings, whereby it can provide lower sciences with the truths on which they can ground their demonstrations. Immaterial being is the subject-matter of theoretical knowledge, whereas material being is the realm of practical reasoning and the practical sciences and productive arts. Man, as rational soul in a body, relates to this structure in that human beings find their highest accomplishment in the perfection of theoretical wisdom, whereas practical reasoning and wisdom have to do with the good administration of the soul's bodily existence.

The finality of science, according to Eustratios, emerges in his interpretation of the relation between the life of theoretical wisdom, comparable to that of the divine, which Aristotle advocates at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10.7–8), and the life of practical virtues and actions which much of the rest of Aristotle's work describes. The life of the soul in the body, for Eustratios, involves imposing measure on our passions (*metriopatheia*), and ordering our material desires and emotions, which brings about what "the ancient sages" called happiness (*eudaimonia*), the goal of human life, the reason we are here in this material world. However, Eustratios describes this rational discipline of the desires as tending in fact to a suppression of the desires to the point of reaching freedom from all passion (*apatheia*):

[This *apatheia* is] what we call felicity (*makariotes*). For he who seeks the perfect must strive towards the complete death (*nekrosis*) of the irrational faculties, so that only reason (*logos*) is in activity in him, undisturbed by irrationality. And when this happens, the human soul, through continuous and uninterrupted activity of reason, ascends to intellect (*nous*) and becomes intellective, i.e., intellect by participation, and then even divine-like, through being united with God by means of the “one” which is within the soul, what the great Dionysios called the flower of intellect.¹⁰

Dionysios (the Areopagite) was a Christian theologian who incorporated much of Proklos’ philosophy, including the idea of a “flower” of the intellect, although in Byzantium it was supposed, for example by Psellos, that Dionysios was Proklos’ source of inspiration. In this passage in Eustratios’ commentary, we see that science, as the highest form of knowledge, is conceived as a stage in the search for the ultimate goal, felicity. Science, as the perfection of theoretical knowledge, leads the soul up to an intellectual grasp of truth which transcends scientific thinking and culminates in unification with God. Eustratios clearly sees in these ideas an aspiration that he shares and which he assumes is Christian.

Michael of Ephesos, who produced commentaries on other works of Aristotle relating to logic and physics, also commented on other books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, namely 5, 9, and 10. In general, it appears that he holds views similar to those of Eustratios on the nature and finality of science. The following passage from his commentary may suffice to show this:

The intellect in each of us is related to God, through similarity in its activity. For God thinks Himself and we think ourselves, when we transcend the faculty of imagination (*phantasia*) . . . He loves the intellect related to God who embraces all virtue, escaping the various desires and related perceptions which deceive thought . . . ascending to science (*episteme*) and intellect (*nous*), and after this going up to intellective life (*noera*) and simple intuitions, in which he receives the illuminations from There and is filled with pure light.¹¹

Like Eustratios, Michael distinguishes between two sorts of happiness, the lower happiness of the life of the soul in the body and the higher happiness that is reached through theoretical knowledge and that culminates in unification with God, assimilation to God.¹² As in Eustratios, assimilation to God as the ultimate goal of human activities, promoted by science as a stage in the ascent, is described as Christian.

¹⁰ Eustratios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* 4.25–38.

¹¹ Michael of Ephesos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* 603.16–30.

¹² For assimilation to God as the goal of philosophy in Platonism, see O’Meara 2003: 31–39.

THE PALAIOLOGAN PERIOD

The capture of Constantinople in 1204 by the Crusaders and the continuing expansion of the Ottomans in the eastern parts of the Byzantine empire brought (and forced) Byzantine intellectuals into much closer contact with their western Latin counterparts and with Arabic and Persian science. Threatened with the disaster that would eventually come in 1453 with the capture of Constantinople by Mehmet II, Byzantine intellectuals had to come to terms with the powerful forces that surrounded them and endangered not only their political survival but also their cultural identity. With the Christian west, this resulted in a greater exposure to western ideas – texts of Boethius, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas were translated into Greek – but also occasioned the rejection of western cultural arrogance, in particular as regards the identity of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity. The problem centred on the question of unification with the Latin Church: At what price, in terms of what theological compromise, could union be achieved? Was the price too high? The problem remained critical and found no lasting solution. This situation of stress meant also that Byzantine intellectuals could see their own cultural heritage in a new light. Convinced of their cultural superiority to the “barbarians” (eastern and western) who surrounded them, they could appreciate this heritage more fully, rather than taking it simply for granted, and indeed we can observe that Byzantine scholars of this period became very active in the exploitation of philosophical, scientific, and literary texts from antiquity, while showing some liberty in relation to this inheritance.

A scholar (and priest) one might mention in this regard is George Pachymeres, who produced a *Quadrivium* summarizing the four mathematical sciences; a *Philosophia*, which summarizes Aristotle’s philosophy; commentaries on Aristotle and a commentary which supplements Proklos’ commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides*; as well as other works. In many cases, we even have Pachymeres’ autograph manuscripts of these works. One of these is his *Quadrivium*, where, at the beginning, he provides the following definition of science:

Wisdom is science (*episteme*) of the truth in existing things, science is the infallible and unchanging apprehension of the subject-matter; but this apprehension cannot be infallible and unchanging unless its objects themselves are also invariably disposed in the same way.¹³

This definition is taken from Nikomachos of Gerasa’s *Introduction to Arithmetic* (4.9–10), a textbook of the second century that had become the standard manual of arithmetic in the Platonist schools of late antiquity.

¹³ I cite the translation in Bydén 2003: 286, slightly modified.

Nikomachos, a Platonist philosopher himself, saw the infallible and unchanging character defining science as deriving from the nature of the objects with which it was concerned, eternal, unchanging, immaterial, true beings, which contrasted with the evanescent semblance of being in material objects. Pachymeres adopts this way of understanding “science” and follows Plato and Plotinos, as well as Nikomachos, in seeing the mathematical sciences as providing the means for reaching knowledge of true immaterial being. The larger significance of this becomes clearer if we note that, for Pachymeres, the study of Aristotle’s physics also leads to the discovery of an eternal and immutable cause transcending the world, God. Science thus fits into the search by the human soul for knowledge and union with God. Pachymeres gives philosophy an important place in this search.

A particularly interesting case is provided by Theodore Metochites, an intellectual who reached an eminent position at the Byzantine court and stood at the crossroads of the intellectual trends of his time. In the essays of his *Semeioseis gnomikai*, Metochites repeatedly refers (in essays 22 and 23) to the Platonic distinction between eternal unchanging immaterial being and evanescent fluctuating material existence, in order to cast doubt on the reliability of our knowledge of the physical world. So unreliable are its objects that physics can hardly be rated as science. On the other hand, the mathematical sciences, given their objects, are capable of true knowledge. A sign of this difference between physics and mathematics is the clash of dissenting opinions endemic to physics, which contrasts with the peaceful unanimity characterizing mathematics. In the field of mathematics, Greeks and barbarians – even the barbarians of his own time, Metochites says – agree. Later, in the seventeenth century, René Descartes would also see in the unanimity of mathematics a mark (in fact a consequence) of its truly scientific character. Metochites presents the same position in his astronomical manual, the *Stoicheiosis astronomike*.¹⁴ An important source for Metochites here was Ptolemy, who, in the prologue to his *Suntaxis mathematica* (the *Almagest*), stresses the conjectural opinions (*eikasia*) found in physics and metaphysics as compared with the scientific grasp exhibited by mathematics. But what then does Metochites make of metaphysics, which was considered by Platonists of late antiquity to be the highest science, on which mathematics depends?

It would appear that Metochites, like Ptolemy, is suspicious of the claims of metaphysics. He considers Aristotle’s treatise on metaphysics to be a failure (*Semeioseis gnomikai* 21), and seems to think that, on such difficult matters that transcend human capacities, we should resort rather to reliance on orthodox Christian doctrine. It has been suggested that this

¹⁴ See Chapter 11.

attitude may be related to the theological polemics surrounding the attempts at union with the western Church.¹⁵ Metochites' father, an advocate of union, was imprisoned for some forty years when the pendulum swung back in the anti-unionist direction at the court. Metochites may have thought it wise to eschew philosophical discussion of theological import and to rely on the knowledge given through revelation. But another question arises: what are these eternal immutable objects with which mathematics deals and which give it its scientific character? For Ptolemy, the eternal objects are the movements of the heavens studied in astronomy. But what of the objects of the other mathematical sciences? On this point also, Metochites' position is intriguing. He seems to hold that mathematical objects are concepts derived by abstraction from the observation of physical things. But how they could reach their status as immutable and eternal, despite this dependence on material things, is not clear. Nevertheless, we can take note of the way in which Metochites advocated the mathematical sciences as true "science" in the wake of Ptolemy (and in anticipation of Descartes and other philosophers and scientists of the modern period). The "Aristotelian" conception of science was now most fully embodied, not by metaphysics, as it was for example in Proklos, but by mathematics.

The generation following Metochites saw intensified discussions between intellectuals around the use or rejection of the Greek philosophical and scientific heritage, especially in the debates provoked by spiritual movements within Byzantium and by confrontations with Latin theology. Three figures might be named in this regard: Metochites' pupil and intellectual heir, Nikephoros Gregoras; the leader of an important monastic movement, Gregory Palamas; and Barlaam, a monk who came from Calabria, was well educated in Latin philosophy and theology, and enthusiastically appropriated the philosophical culture of Byzantium. The conflicts that developed among them had to do in part with theological questions that became acute when they considered the different ways in which the Latin theologians should be countered. From the complicated and highly polemical confrontations that ensued, which ended in condemnation, exclusion, silence, or banishment, we might retain here the following points. While wishing to show competence in logic, even going so far as to claim that theological doctrines were susceptible of scientific demonstration, Palamas had ultimately little time for pagan science and insisted on submission to divine revelation. Gregoras, on the other hand, shared Metochites' interests, in particular in astronomy, and came close to the thought of Psellos. He criticized an Aristotelian science (such as that practiced in the Latin west) based on and derived from perception and

¹⁵ Bydén 2003: 275.

experience of material things, and seems to have conceived of a metaphysical knowledge, innate in the human soul, such as that which had been described by Proklos and Psellos. Barlaam also seems to have entertained such a theory of metaphysical knowledge – he made use in this connection of texts by Syrianos and Proklos,¹⁶ and exploited his extensive knowledge of Aristotle's logic in order to criticize the assumption, made by Palamas and by western theologians, that demonstrative and scientific arguments could be elaborated concerning God.

A final episode might be added to our survey, that represented by George Gemistos Plethon, who died just before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the monk George Gennadios Scholarios. Plethon, who taught philosophy in Mistra and who, as a member of the Byzantine delegation to the Council of Ferrara-Florence, made a considerable impression on Italian humanists, appears to have conceived radical and revolutionary remedies to the terrible woes afflicting the Byzantine state. In advocating a return to the philosophy of the ancients, in particular that of Plato (as interpreted by Proklos), he seems to have seen Christianity, and the Aristotelianism of which it made use, as a source of the political woes of the time. An ideal state would be founded, not on Christian theology, but on a Platonist metaphysics, expressed by a pagan pantheon corresponding to this metaphysics. The return to the past was not a retrogression, but a recovery of a forgotten metaphysics on which human life could be based. Scholarios, who was made patriarch of Constantinople by Mehmet II in 1454, had Plethon's major work, the *Laws*, destroyed. Well versed in Latin theology, in particular in the theology of Aquinas, Scholarios saw the value of Aristotelianism in the service of Christian theology and the danger to Christianity represented by Plethon's revival of Platonist metaphysics.

CONCLUSION

This brief sketch has discussed a conception of "science" which involves the reference to specific norms that must be satisfied, if a kind of knowledge is to qualify as being "scientific." Such a conception was developed by Aristotle, was adapted by the Platonists of late antiquity, and recurs throughout Byzantine intellectual history. The Aristotelian conception of science identified generality and the knowledge of first causes as characterizing science, a knowledge involving necessary and eternal truths and constituting the ultimate goal of human desire. Such a conception of science found its realization most fully in metaphysics. The Platonist adaptation of this conception in late antiquity stressed the eternity and

¹⁶ Both Gregoras and Barlaam seem to have used Eustratios' commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

immutability of the immaterial realities grounding the eternal and necessary truths of science, understanding metaphysics as derived not from sense-perception but from the rigorous articulation of truths innate in the human soul, and seeing the highest degree of science as leading to a grasp of transcendent causes which goes beyond discursive thinking and leads to union of the soul with these causes.

This “Aristotelian” conception of science does not seem to have changed throughout Byzantine intellectual history. But it was sometimes challenged, even rejected, or seen as applying not to metaphysics but to another science, such as mathematics. Indeed metaphysics, as representing science in its essence, remained a problem, in particular in its uneasy and unresolved relationship to Christian doctrine. Metaphysics could appear in some cases, such as in Psellos, to take up much of the space of Christian doctrine, or, as in Plethon, to replace it completely. Metaphysics could also be completely rejected, along with the ideal of science which it represented. Christian revelation would then be the only true science, the only science that human beings need. But of course this is science only as expressing God’s knowledge; in human beings, it is belief. Or metaphysics could be played down and its role as the highest degree of science given to another science, mathematics, as in Metochites. However, Metochites does not seem to have fully justified the claims of mathematics to correspond to the Aristotelian conception of science.

The situation is comparable to that in the Latin west. The large-scale development of universities there in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries coincided with the renewed access to Aristotle’s works, translated in part from Byzantine manuscripts, in part from Arabic versions. The integration of this new (pagan and Islamic) knowledge in the university curriculum created tensions in regard to Christian doctrine comparable to what we observe in Byzantium. However, the elaboration of Christian revelation into “sacred doctrine,” a body of teaching structured as if it were an Aristotelian science, in Aquinas for example, allowed for the theoretical and institutional integration of metaphysics as the queen of the sciences and the handmaid of “sacred doctrine.” This integration, through subordination, would have appealed no doubt to someone like Scholarios – but not to someone who, like Plethon, was committed to the inherited “Aristotelian” conception of science.

CHAPTER 11
ASTRONOMY

ANNE TIHON

Astronomy always played an important part in the intellectual life of Byzantium. For a modern historian this may even constitute a precise barometer of the scientific level of Byzantine scholars. There is ample evidence that the intellectual training included at each period the study of the “four sciences” that the western medieval world called, after Boethius, the *quadrivium* of the sciences. But the depth of such study could be extremely variable according to the period and specific milieu. In the case of astronomy there can be no comparison between the rudiments taught by John of Damascus in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* and the subtle calculations of eclipses made by Nikephoros Gregoras with help of Ptolemy’s tables in the years 1330–1337, an exercise that became fashionable among the intelligentsia in the first half of the fourteenth century; nor between the basic compilations found in some manuscripts and the tables established by George Gemistus Pletho in Mistra for the year 1433.

First, one has to distinguish among cosmology, astronomy, and astrology. Often considered a part of philosophy or even of religious theory, *cosmology* dealt with the general conception of the universe and included many of the rudiments of astronomy, generally a mixture of scientific notions and non-scientific ideas of various origins. In this chapter, we call “scientific” the notions that came from ancient scientific works (Euclid, Ptolemy, Archimedes, etc.) or from their continuators (Arabic, Persian, Latin, Jewish), because these notions are based on the same principles as modern science: explicit methodology, observations, demonstration, experiment, checking of the results, and theorization. Of course some of its notions do not conform to modern scientific practices, but the mental processes were comparable (and were originated by the Greek scientists of Alexandria).

At any period in Byzantine history, one can see young people educated in the “four sciences” as defined by the Alexandrian tradition. Especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they were extremely proud of their knowledge of the ancient treatises, and it is thanks to them we can read and understand these works today. By contrast, “non-scientific” ideas come

from a literal interpretation of the Bible, mythology, esoteric theories, and popular superstition, the origin of such ideas being sometimes rather difficult to determine.¹ Similarly, “scientific astronomy” is the study or practice of astronomy based on scientific astronomical treatises even if there is no new personal research or observations. In Byzantium, moreover, a scientist was almost always a universal scholar able to exercise his talents in rhetoric, literature, grammar, theology, and philosophy, as well as in the sciences.

Astronomy as a scientific matter can be divided into several topics: spherical astronomy, mainly based on ancient treatises on the celestial sphere; mathematical astronomy, which allowed one to perform calculations concerning the most important astronomical phenomena (such as the position of the Sun, Moon, and planets; syzygies; and lunar and solar eclipses); also treatises concerning the plane astrolabe and sometimes other astronomical instruments; and finally the computation of Easter, a problem linked to astronomical premises. Astronomy was also intimately linked to *astrology*, for astrologers needed astronomical tables to establish the *themation* on which they based predictions. A *themation* (often wrongly called a “horoscope”) is a codified diagram showing some celestial data: longitudes of the Sun, Moon, and the five planets, and the “houses” (sections of the ecliptic counted from the horoscope, the point of the ecliptic crossing the horizon) at a given time. Generally it is presented in a rectangular form (e.g. in Monacensis Gr. 525). The data written in a *themation* are purely astronomical: astrology begins with the interpretation given by the astrologer.

Contrary to a common notion, the Byzantines, at least educated ones, did not confuse astronomy and astrology. The first was the “theoretical” part while the second was the “practical” part; or, according to the explanation of Theodore Metochites, astronomy deals with the matter contained in the *Mathematical Syntaxis* (or *Almagest*) of Ptolemy, while astrology with the matter of the *Tetrabiblos*.²

COSMOLOGY

Pagan cosmology as inherited from Plato and Aristotle presupposed a spherical universe with the Earth at the center, the size of which was like a point relative to the size of the universe. The latter consisted of nested

¹ On the distinction between “science” (*episteme*) and “non-science,” see for example the letter of Nikephoros Gregoras to Pepagomenos (*Letter 40*) in which he opposes his own astronomical predictions (positions of the planets and eclipses, calculated through Ptolemy’s tables) to the stupid astrological predictions coming from Persia; see also Theodore Metochites’ description of astronomy in Ševčenko 1962: 260–264.

² Bydén 2003: 469.

concentric spheres, each bearing a celestial body; from the nearest to the most distant they were the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the fixed stars. Only circular and uniform motions were supposed to be appropriate for the celestial bodies. Moreover, from the physical point of view Aristotle had organized the cosmos according to the four elements: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire formed concentric spheres in the sublunar world. Above that, the world of astral bodies was the domain of a fifth element. With the Christianization of the empire, the Aristotelian view of the cosmos came into conflict with concepts derived from the Bible. But the Fathers of the Church, especially Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379) and his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394), had received an excellent classical training, and their influence would be decisive. Far from rejecting pagan science, Basil tried in his commentary on the Creation (*Hexaemeron*) to reconcile pagan cosmology with the narration of Genesis. Basil and his brother generally accepted Hellenic cosmology and allowed an allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, but with the difference from pagan philosophers that the universe was for them not eternal, but created by God.³

The conflict reappeared in Alexandria in the sixth century under a different form with Kosmas Indikopleustes (c. 534–547) who proposed in his *Christian Topography* a vision of the world stemming from the Nestorian cosmology and taught in the Syrian schools of Edessa and Nisibis. In this cosmology, the world has the shape of Moses' Tabernacle (a vaulted chest) in which the Earth is flat, rectangular, and surrounded by the Ocean. Eden is situated on the eastern side. These views were contested by John Philoponos (c. 495–568), who supported the spherical vision of the universe.⁴ Philoponos also fought against the eternity of the world, which was still defended by the pagan philosophers.⁵ Subsequent Byzantine intellectuals adopted the spherical world of Aristotle, but Kosmas' cosmology did not totally disappear: it would be successful in the Slavic world, and some Byzantine texts of the twelfth century (especially a treatise by Peter the Philosopher) still defended the vision of the world in the shape of Moses' Tabernacle.⁶

In the eighth century, in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, John of Damascus, the great defender of the icons, gives an account of scientific beliefs suitable for a Christian.⁷ These are elementary notions, but behind them one can recognize a classical education. They include the correct theory of the mechanism of eclipses, of the phases of the Moon, of seasons,

³ Nicolaides 2011: 1–23. ⁴ Wolska-Conus 1962: 170, *passim*; Rosset and Congourdeau 2004.

⁵ Esp. in Philoponos, *On the Eternity of the World against Proklos*. ⁶ Caudano 2008; 2011.

⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.6–7; see Tihon 1993: 182–183; Nicolaides 2011: 46–49.

and of the dates of the entrance of the Sun into the zodiacal signs, though not without errors. Nevertheless, John has no firm scientific views. Thus he explains the theory of a spherical universe, but some others, he says, have conceived a hemispherical sky. In the same way, he relates various opinions concerning the shape of the Earth (some say it is spherical, others conical), but he does not decide which one is right. In any case, he concludes that whatever the shape is, it is to conform to God's will.

In the wake of John's works,⁸ one finds in the manuscripts many cosmological compilations in which various topics are treated, including the shape of the cosmos, the motion of the Sun, the seasons, the entrance of the Sun into the zodiacal signs, the phases of the Moon, eclipses, planetary spheres, the shape and size of the Earth, physical concepts such as the cycles of the four elements (Water, Earth, Air, Fire), and phenomena such as earthquakes, comets, thunder, and other meteorological and geographical data. In such collections, which have not yet been catalogued, one finds a mixture of scientific and non-scientific views. For example, eclipses are correctly explained by the passage of the Moon in front of the Sun (solar eclipses) or the passage of the Moon in the shadow of the Earth (lunar eclipses), but also by the interposition of a "black star" which prevents the Sun's rays from reaching us.⁹ Planetary spheres are often presented according to the ancient scientific model, but in some texts a ninth sphere is occupied by a large star in the shape of a snake that announces disasters: the death of a king when the snake waves its tongue, earthquakes when it shakes its scales, and so on.¹⁰ Kosmas' ideas reappear, such as the sky in the shape of a chest with a vault and a flat Earth. These anonymous compilations, often accompanied by diagrams and figures, are difficult to date and to localize, and it is not easy to see if they present widespread ideas or just curiosities preserved by some copyists.

On the contrary, encyclopedic compilations written by eminent scholars such as Michael Psellos and Symeon Seth (c. 1080) offer cosmological and astronomical concepts that follow ancient science, mainly based on Aristotle and Plutarch.¹¹ But the scientific level of their work remains basic and reproduces trivial explanations of astronomical or meteorological phenomena. A story related by the high official and historian George Acropolites shows that at the beginning of the thirteenth century the scientific explanation of eclipses was not commonly known in high society.

⁸ Such collections are often associated with John's works, but also with Psellos', astrological texts, or in an unpredictable way in any kind of manuscripts.

⁹ E.g. the mss. Ox. Seldenianus 16 (Arch. Seld. Supra 17), fol. 108v; Ox. Hokhamicus Gr. 110, fol. 182v; Monacensis Gr. 287, fol. 126; see Baudry 2014: 20.

¹⁰ Baudry 2014.

¹¹ Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina*; Symeon Seth, *Conspectus rerum naturalium* and *De utilitate corporum caelestium*.

The author reports a discussion at the court of Nicaea concerning the solar eclipse of 3 June 1239.¹² Full of enthusiasm, the author as a young man delivers a speech in which he gives the scientific explanation for eclipses he had just learned from his master Nikephoros Blemmydes (d. c. 1272). But the empress mocked him, and a court physician with the dignity of *aktouarios* contradicted him. Unfortunately the historian does not tell us what rival explanation was upheld by the *aktouarios*. One could not of course extend to the whole court of Nicaea the ignorance shown by him and the empress. Her husband, the emperor John Vatatzes (1222–1254), made great effort to restore a high level of scientific teaching, which was exemplified by Nikephoros Blemmydes and would prepare the ground for the extraordinary renewal of the Palaiologan period.

Two generations later, around 1310, Theodore Metochites wrote in a pamphlet against ignorant scholars (namely, his enemy Nikephoros Choumnos) that one cannot presume to have astronomical knowledge from the simple fact that one is able to explain eclipses of the Sun by the interposition of the Moon and eclipses of the Moon by the interposition of the shadow of the Earth. These observations, he says, are so obvious that fishes themselves would expound them if they were able to speak!¹³ According to Metochites, one can boast about astronomical knowledge only if one has studied Ptolemy and is able to predict, based on his tables, exactly when and where eclipses will occur, as well as other astronomical phenomena. Metochites will be the great renewer of Ptolemaic astronomy at the very beginning of the fourteenth century (see below).¹⁴

SPHERICAL ASTRONOMY

The study of astronomy normally began with the reading of the elementary treatises written by ancient authors on the celestial sphere, those *On the Moving Sphere* and *On Risings and Settings* by Autolykos of Pytane; the *Distances of the Moon and the Sun* of Aristarchos of Samos; the *Introduction to the Phenomena* of Geminus; the *Spherika*, the *Habitations*, and *Days and Nights* of Theodosios of Tripoli; the *On Circular Motion* of Kleomedes; the *Mathematics Useful for Reading Plato* of Theon of Smyrna; the *Anaphorikos* of Hypsikles; the *Phenomena* of Euclid; and others. Thanks to these works, Byzantine students could learn about the basic form of the celestial sphere and its main circles (ecliptic, equator, meridian, tropics), the geometry and theorems of the moving sphere, the motion of the Sun, the equinoxes and solstices, the risings and settings of the stars, and other basic notions. Such knowledge was considered the first step in astronomical studies, and one can

¹² Akropolites, *History* 39; see Constantinides 1982: 14. ¹³ Ševčenko 1962: 258–259.

¹⁴ Bydén 2003: 235.

see that these treatises were carefully copied in many manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries (e.g. Vat. Gr. 204) until the end of the empire.

In his account of the reign of emperor Michael V (1041–1042), Psellos criticizes the astrologers who were then influential at the imperial court.¹⁵ Those people, he says, did not concern themselves with the order and the motions of the spheres, they did not know the geometrical demonstrations related to them, but rather limited themselves to the calculation of the *kentra* and other astrological data necessary for their predictions. This passage shows that Psellos was well aware of the techniques of astrology (as he admits) and confirms that the knowledge of celestial geometry was considered as indispensable to a real scientific training. Therefore, one might suppose that all good scholars who were educated in the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία (*enkyklios paideia*) had studied the basis of astronomy through the treatises quoted above. Another example is John Pediasimos, who was “Consul of the Philosophers” around 1280. He wrote scholia on Kleomedes and an essay on the seven planets, and is perhaps the author of an anonymous treatise on the celestial sphere written on the model of Euclid’s *Data* and preserved in Vat. Gr. 255.¹⁶ Barlaam’s *Treatise on the Easter Computus* written around 1333 also begins with a long description on the celestial sphere based on Theodosios, Autolykos, Geminos, and Theon of Smyrna.¹⁷ This systematic exposé, which was not really necessary for the subject, was certainly for Barlaam a way to demonstrate his solid background in astronomy in the face of his rivals, especially Gregoras.

MATHEMATICAL ASTRONOMY

This part of astronomy was the most important, because it enabled one to make calculations. For it one could use the magisterial work of Ptolemy, who had established in Alexandria the basis of astronomical research that would remain unchanged during the whole Arabic and western Middle Ages. The most important work by Ptolemy was the *Mathematical Syntaxis*, which Greeks and Byzantines called “the Great Syntaxis” (*Μεγάλη Σύνταξις*) and Arabs *al-majisti*, an appellation derived from Greek μέγιστη (*megiste*), “the Greatest”, which became in Latin *Almagestum*. In this work, Ptolemy proposes complicated constructions based on combinations of circles (eccentrics and epicycles) in order to reproduce the irregular apparent motions of the stars while maintaining Plato’s and Aristotle’s postulate of circular and uniform movements. He relies on numerous observations coming from the Babylonians and his Greek predecessors such as Meton, Timocharis, and Hipparchos, and on

¹⁵ Psellos, *Chronographia* 5.19. ¹⁶ These are unfortunately still not edited. ¹⁷ Tihon 2011.

his own observations. He compiled many tables in order to calculate the positions of the Sun and Moon, their syzygies (conjunctions and oppositions), eclipses, the longitude and latitude of the five planets, and a catalogue of 1,022 fixed stars. The *Almagest* is a difficult work and understanding it entails mastering many trigonometric theorems; its study marked the summit of astronomical training. In order to understand the *Almagest*, scholars had at their disposal the *Commentaries* by Pappos (c. 323) and mainly those by Theon of Alexandria (c. 364). Ptolemy had also compiled astronomical tables much easier to use than the tables of the *Almagest*, namely the *Πρόχειροι κανόνες* (*Procheiroi kanones*, or *Handy Tables*). This set of tables had been explained by Theon in two commentaries: the *Great Commentary*, a difficult work that was not especially successful, and a *Small Commentary*, that became a best seller, especially in the Palaiologan period. It is a small manual, written for his less gifted students, and it explains clearly how to use the *Handy Tables*, with examples that were easy to follow. Thanks to this manual, astrologers or amateurs astronomers could make calculations without studying any theorem or sophisticated demonstrations. We know around fifty Byzantine manuscripts of the *Small Commentary* and the *Handy Tables*.

In the seventh century, another manual, attributed to Stephanos of Alexandria, one of the last philosophers of Alexandria before the Arabic conquest, explains how to use the *Handy Tables*.¹⁸ This work, in imitation of Theon's *Small Commentary*, offers an adaptation of Ptolemy's tables for Constantinople. Some astronomical tables (namely oblique ascensions, parallaxes, planetary phases) vary according to the terrestrial latitude. Ptolemy made his tables for different climates (latitudes). The *oikoumene* (inhabited world) was traditionally divided by the ancient geographers into seven climates (from south to north: Meroe, Syene, Lower Egypt, Rhodes, Hellespont, the middle of Pontos, and Borysthenes), and the astronomer had to choose the appropriate climate for his calculations. Byzantium (lat. 43° according to Ptolemy) was situated between the fifth and the sixth climate; thus for Constantinople the astronomer had to make supplementary interpolations in order to get exact results. With special tables for the latitude of Constantinople, these calculations were greatly simplified.

This treatise was annotated and extended by the emperor Herakleios himself, and later it was rediscovered and carefully studied by Gregoras and other scholars.¹⁹ As for the *Handy Tables*, in the ninth century it was copied in four manuscripts using uncial script (Leid. BPG 78, and three luxurious mss.: Vat. Gr. 1291, Laur. 28/26, and Marc. Gr. 331). Anonymous scholia written in the ninth or tenth century in the Vat. Gr. 1291 summarily

¹⁸ Lempire 2016. ¹⁹ Lempire 2011.

explain the use of the tables.²⁰ One can thus suppose that scientists such as Leo the Mathematician, who was famous for his talents in astrology, might have used the tables. Again, at the beginning of the eleventh century, an anonymous treatise on the *quadrivium* of sciences (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) also explains briefly the use of the tables in the chapter devoted to astronomy,²¹ as does an anonymous collection of texts that gives examples of astronomical calculations for the years 1003 and 1007.

In the eleventh century, however, Ptolemy's astronomy was in competition with Arabic astronomy. From the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833), the Arabs had initiated important astronomical researches thanks to the observatories created by the caliph in Baghdad and Damascus. But it is only in the eleventh century that one finds an echo of Arabic works in some Byzantine texts. Several texts dating from 1032 ff.,²² 1072 ff.,²³ and 1152 ff.²⁴ witness a good knowledge of important Arabic works and even of a Byzantine adaptation of the tables of an Arabic astronomer called Alim (ibn al-A'lam, d. 985). Thanks to Anna Komnene, we know that under the reign of her father Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), foreign astrologers were active at the imperial court in spite of Alexios' ambivalence.²⁵ One of them was perhaps Symeon Seth, who translated into Greek the Arabic tales *Kalila wa Dimna* (*Stephanites and Ichnelates*).²⁶ It seems that Arabic astronomy was known only by some private teachers or astrologers, probably of Egyptian or generally eastern origin. The only preserved Byzantine astrolabe, the Brescia astrolabe, was made in 1062 for a certain Sergios, a man of Persian origin.²⁷

After the reconquest of Constantinople by Michael Palaiologos in 1261, there began the most prestigious period of intellectual life of the Byzantine empire. Ancient texts, many concerning astronomy, were copied, restored, edited, corrected, extended, and imitated by eminent scholars such as Maximos Planoudes, Manuel Bryennios, Metochites, Gregoras, and others. A *quadrivium* written around 1300 by George Pachymeres contains an astronomical section, which gives general notions about the celestial sphere, the risings and settings of stars, and many detailed explanations of sexagesimal calculation (the numeral system with sixty as its base: degrees, minutes, seconds, thirds, etc.).

The mastering of sexagesimal calculation was necessary for astronomical practice and, following a tradition going back to the Alexandrian schools, was included in many astronomical treatises written in the fourteenth century. Around the same time, Metochites wrote an enormous treatise

²⁰ Mogenet 1969. ²¹ Heiberg 1929. ²² Mogenet 1962; Tihon 1989; 2009: 395–397.

²³ Jones 1987. ²⁴ Tihon 1989. ²⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7.

²⁶ This is uncertain; see Magdalino 2006a: 101; and Chapter 5. ²⁷ Dalton 1926.

entitled *Elements of Astronomy* in which he tried to explain Ptolemaic astronomy. This work also contains an important arithmetical section. There is still no modern edition of this treatise which, moreover, discourages the modern reader through its pompous and redundant style.²⁸

Metochites' pupil Gregoras took up the torch and launched a new challenge, namely the prediction and calculation of eclipses. Metochites was proud of his ability to predict eclipses exactly, but he did not leave any practical example. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, there was a series of solar eclipses visible in Constantinople as total or near-total eclipses. Gregoras left a calculation of the solar eclipse of 16 July 1330, which he made using Ptolemy's tables as well as the *Almagest* and the *Handy Tables*.²⁹ Gregoras predicted future eclipses, challenging his rivals. In response, Barlaam of Seminara published the calculations of the solar eclipses of 14 May 1333, and 3 March 1337, perfectly carried out with the tables of the *Almagest*.³⁰ In this way, astronomy became a matter of polemic in which equally gifted adversaries confronted each other, and a fashionable exercise for the Byzantine intelligentsia. During the entire fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, one can find many eclipse calculations in manuscripts.

If Ptolemaic astronomy found many supporters at the start of the fourteenth century, there were also scientists, mainly astrologers, who wanted to use more efficient astronomical tables. Indeed, Ptolemy's tables were outdated, with an error of some 6° in the longitude of the Sun. At the end of the thirteenth century, the reputation of Persian astronomy had also reached Constantinople. In 1259, the Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan had established in Maragha an observatory which quickly became renowned everywhere, from the western world to the Far East. A little later, Ghāzān Khan (1295–1304) also built an observatory in Tabriz. The astronomical work carried out in these observatories, not far from Trebizond, was not ignored by the Byzantines. Thus a man called George (or Gregory) Chioniades, the future bishop of Tabriz, who wanted to learn astronomy, went to Persia via Trebizond and was allowed to study astronomy under the supervision of the Persian astronomer Shams Bukharī (c. 1295–1296).³¹ He returned to Trebizond and Constantinople with Persian astronomical books which he started to translate into Greek. Several manuscripts from the end of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century indeed contain Greek translations of Persian astronomical treatises (especially the Vat. Gr. 211, end of the thirteenth; Vat. Gr. 191, c. 1302; and Laur. 28/17, copied after 1346 by Meliteniotes).³² These translations, which are

²⁸ An edition of the *Stoicheiosis* (I, 5–30) is being prepared by E. Paschos and C. Simelidis.

²⁹ Mogenet et al. 1983. ³⁰ Mogenet and Tihon 1977. ³¹ Pingree 1964; Tihon 1987.

³² Pingree 1985–1986.

rudimentary and incomprehensible to a Byzantine reader, with technical Persian words simply transcribed in Greek, are probably the result of Chioniades' expeditions and perhaps contain contributions by other scholars whose names have disappeared.

Those translations were not really successful. But Chioniades' books were inherited by a priest of Trebizond named Manuel, who had among his pupils George Chrysokokkes. Chrysokokkes wrote a treatise around 1347 under the title *Persian Syntaxis* in which he adapts the *Zij-i Īlkhāni* of Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī (c. 1270), one of the most eminent Persian astronomers, who was the director of Maragha observatory.³³ This treatise met with enormous success: Chrysokokkes wrote in good Greek and used Greek equivalents for the barbarian terminology, and his manual was inspired by Theon's *Small Commentary*. Like Theon, Chrysokokkes gave many examples, which were easy to follow. So the Persian astronomical tables spread throughout the broader Byzantine world – we know of adaptations made in Cyprus, Rhodes, and Mytilene. But the Persian tables were closely linked to astrology. Chioniades, and Chrysokokkes after him, justify their use for astrological purposes, especially for astrological medicine. So Persian astronomy became suspicious in the eyes of the Church. In 1352, Theodore Meliteniotes, director of the “patriarchal academy,” wrote an *Astronomical Tribiblos* in which he devoted book one to sexagesimal calculation and the drawing of the astrolabe; book two to Ptolemaic astronomy; and book three to Persian astronomy. At the beginning of his work, Meliteniotes firmly condemns astrology and delivers an eloquent eulogy of astronomy in order to glorify God's Creation. Since then it seems that mathematical astronomy was a part of the training of the clerics of the Orthodox Church. Indeed, many astronomical treatises, especially in the fifteenth century, were written by members or servants of the Church, including Isidore Glabas, John Chortasmenos, Michel Chrysokokkes, Markos Eugenikos, Matthew Kamariotes, Bessarion, Isidore of Russia, and others.³⁴

In the manuscripts of these centuries, one finds many astronomical calculations or comments whose authors can sometimes be identified through their handwriting. The most usual problems were syzygies, a calculation linked to the Easter computus, and eclipses. Planetary calculations were performed less frequently, mainly by astrologers.

In spite of the success of the Persian tables, Byzantine scholars did not give up on Ptolemy's tables. In 1368, Isaac Argyros wrote an adaptation of Ptolemy's tables for syzygies, the Sun and Moon, for Constantinople and the Roman calendar. Ptolemy's tables are made for the geographical coordinates of Alexandria and use the ancient Egyptian calendar; the

³³ Mercier 1984. ³⁴ Tihon 1996.

time is given for the meridian of Alexandria, and the years are counted from the Babylonian king Nabonassar (747 BCE) in the *Almagest* or from Philip Arrhidaios (324 BCE) in the *Handy Tables*. This was discouraging for a Byzantine amateur who had to convert a date, given in the Roman calendar and the world era, and the time given at Constantinople, to the corresponding data necessary for the use of Ptolemy's tables. Although the procedure was described at length in many texts, this remained a source of errors and an obstacle for beginners.³⁵ With the tables of Isaac Argyros, one could now use directly the Roman calendar, the hour of Constantinople,³⁶ and the year as counted from 1 September 1367.

Byzantine scholars could not really choose between Ptolemy and Persian tables, for Chrysokokkes' *Persian Syntaxis* was spoiled by some errors while Ptolemy's tables could still give good results for the time of syzygies or eclipses. So John Chortasmenos (c. 1415), a prolific calculator, made dubious compromises, starting a calculation with Ptolemy's tables, adjusting the results by the simple addition of 6°, and finishing the whole thing with Persian tables.³⁷

In their quest for tables that were easier to use and more reliable, the Byzantines turned to other foreign tables.³⁸ In 1380, Demetrios Chrysoloras wrote an adaptation of the *Alphonsine Tables*,³⁹ which he knew probably via Cyprus.⁴⁰ But at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Jewish tables made a remarkable entrance into the scientific landscape of the Byzantine world. Three Jewish astronomical treatises were adapted into Greek: the *Six Wings* (*Shesh Kenaphayim*, Ἑξαπτέρυγον) of Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils of Tarascon (in c. 1365), adapted by Michael Chrysokokkes (c. 1434/5);⁴¹ the *Cycles* of Bonjorn (Jacob ben David Yom-Tob, Perpignan, c. 1361), by Markos Eugenikos (c. 1444); the *Paved Way* (*Orah Selulah*) of Isaac ben Salomon ben Zaddiq Alhadib (c. 1370–1426), by Matthew Kamariotes (d. 1490/1). These treatises were also explained in anonymous works, some of them written in vernacular Greek. We do not know exactly how these treatises were introduced into Constantinople nor why Jewish philosophy and astronomy became so influential in Byzantium at that time. This is a phenomenon little studied and sometimes denied by Byzantinists.

³⁵ As I experience with my own students.

³⁶ Unfortunately Argyros made a crude mistake in adding the time difference between Alexandria and Constantinople (18m) instead of subtracting it. These treatises are unedited. Tihon 1996: 257–256.

³⁷ Caudano 2003. ³⁸ Tihon 1996.

³⁹ The *Alphonsine Tables* are astronomical tables that were disseminated widely in the medieval Latin world; attributed to the king of Castille Alfonso X (1252–1284), they were explained around 1330 by the Parisian astronomers Jean de Murs, Jean de Lignière, and Jean de Saxe.

⁴⁰ Tihon 1996: 259–260. The unique manuscript, Vat. Gr. 1059, copied by John Chortasmenos, gives also parameters for Paris and Cyprus.

⁴¹ Solon 1970.

So far we have seen Byzantine scientists only as continuators or adaptors. But at the end of the Byzantine empire an eminent personality emerges from this tradition and rises above it: George Gemistos Plethon. The last great philosopher and thinker of Byzantium compiled entirely personal and original astronomical tables.⁴² In a short astronomical handbook, he gives tables for Mistra starting from 13 December 1433 (the winter solstice). Inspired by the Jewish version of al-Battānī, these tables reflect Plethon's particular project of a return to antiquity. Indeed it was a lunisolar calendar, with lunar months and an origin at the winter solstice, a date that signifies the return of the Sun's light. This sophisticated composition was not very successful, perhaps because it was condemned, like Plethon's *Laws*, by George Scholarios (patriarch Gennadios II). But it was preserved thanks to a manuscript copied in Florence by a scribe of Bessarion. Cardinal Bessarion was a great amateur of astronomy, a field taught to him by Plethon. Plethon's treatise is a strange and original work, but one which came too late to influence the development of Byzantine astronomical researches.

TREATISES ON THE ASTROLABE

Byzantine astronomy is known to us only through written documents, since almost no instrument has been preserved. There are only a few hints of actual astronomical observations. One could calculate eclipses, but no text shows that the results of the calculation had been tested against observation. In contrast to the Islamic world, the Byzantine court did not build observatories. The emperors were interested in astronomy only for erudition, although sometimes for astrology or for political reasons. Eclipse predictions were actually forbidden by Andronikos III (1328–1341), because such phenomena were considered as announcements of the death of rulers and could cause trouble in an unstable political situation.⁴³

Nevertheless, one instrument aroused much interest: the plane astrolabe. The origin of this instrument remains unknown. The most ancient treatise known is that of John Philoponos (c. 495–568).⁴⁴ An astrolabe is made up of a flat circular receptacle (the "mother") which contains three or four disks called "tympan." These are engraved for the different climates (or latitudes) according to a projection onto the plane of the celestial equator of the main circles of the celestial sphere (horizon, parallels, equator, and meridian). Placed over that is another disk called "spider," showing the ecliptic engraved with the zodiac and a small number of stars; the spider is cut out in such way that the tympan on which it is placed can be read. The zodiac and the stars are linked together through an elegant

⁴² Tihon and Mercier 1998. ⁴³ Gregoras, *Letter* 53 (to John Chrysoloras). ⁴⁴ Segonds 1981.

network which was supposed to resemble a spider's web. The tympana are fixed, while the spider is mobile and represents the daily rotation of the celestial sphere. All the pieces are held together by a pin through the central hole, the pin being secured with a wedge ("horse"). A ring is fixed on the top of the receptacle by which to hang the instrument or to hold it in one's hand. On the back of the astrolabe a ruler (alidade or dioptré) is fixed which allows one to measure the elevation of the Sun or a star. The astrolabe does not give the longitude of the Sun, which must be determined by calculation or with the help of a zodiacal calendar. When one places the spider in the right position, one can read the seasonal hour and the horoscope (the intersection of the ecliptic and the horizon). Later a "shadows square" was added on the back of the instrument for topographical uses.

Only one Byzantine astrolabe has been preserved, the Brescia astrolabe, made in 1062 for a man of Persian origin.⁴⁵ Many treatises on the astrolabe were written in Byzantium, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴⁶ Some of them were written by well-known scholars, including Gregoras, Meliteniotes, Argyros, and others who remain anonymous. Among them there is a treatise of Persian origin attributed to one Siamps the Persian (Shams Bukhari?), whose preface appears to have been written by Shams himself and dedicated to Andronikos II.⁴⁷ Other treatises of western origin were also in circulation, such as a Greek adaptation of pseudo-Messahalla (1309),⁴⁸ and a Cypriot treatise (c. 1340). The Byzantines were interested in drawing the instrument and also by its usage, but they never explained the theorems related to stereographic projection. Other astronomical instruments did exist, but only a few treatises are devoted to them (e.g. to the armillary sphere, quadrant, and candle clock).⁴⁹

EASTER COMPUTATION

The date of Easter is a problem that has raised many controversies, polemics, quarrels, and an abundant secondary literature, which does not always clarify the question. It relies on two astronomical events: the Spring equinox and the first full Moon following the equinox. The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) had decided that all Christians should celebrate Easter on the same day. Gradually the usage that prevailed was to fix the date of Easter on the first Sunday after the first full Moon which followed the Spring equinox. Christians were also supposed to avoid celebrating Easter at the same time as the Jewish Passover. In order to fix the date of Easter, one used the famous 19-year cycle already known by the ancient Greeks and attributed to Meton: 19 solar years = 235 lunations, which meant that

⁴⁵ Dalton 1926. ⁴⁶ Tihon 1995. ⁴⁷ Tihon 1995; Fisher 2012. ⁴⁸ Tihon et al. 2001.

⁴⁹ Tihon 2000.

every 19 years the syzygies (new Moon and full Moon) occurred at (nearly) the same date of the Julian calendar. The theory is rather simple but in practice it was much more complicated: one had to know exactly the date of the Spring equinox, to fix a starting point for the 19-year cycle, to include a cycle of the weekdays, and to establish a “canon” that clergy could follow easily. One first had to choose a starting point corresponding to the day when the Moon was created, a Wednesday according to Genesis. Hence there were endless discussions about the age of the Moon at the time of its creation (God could not have created a half Moon or an invisible one, but there was no agreement on the age of the Moon), about the year of the world on which Creation took place, about the date of the spring equinox at that time, and so on. The Byzantine World Era starting in 5509/8 BCE was in competition for a long time with other eras. We cannot give here an account of all these polemics, which one can find in specialized books.⁵⁰

In the seventh century, under the reign of Herakleios (610–641), we observe increasing interest in this problem: the *Chronicon Pascale*, Maximos the Confessor, George the Monk and Priest, and even the emperor himself offered a rather odd Easter computus. Maximos’ computus is especially noteworthy for its good knowledge of the Jewish calendar.⁵¹ A *Canon for Easter* is attributed to John of Damascus, and many others were proposed over the centuries. But none of those computuses had any real astronomical foundation. In the fourteenth century, however, the discussions became a clearly astronomical matter. In a discussion at the court around 1325, Gregoras proposed to the emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328) a reform of the usual canon. He explained that the date of the spring equinox was no longer correct, because the Julian year of 365¼ days does not correspond exactly to the length of the solar year, which was estimated by Ptolemy at 365¼ days – 1/300.⁵² This amounted to an error of two days in the usual canon (beginning, according to Gregoras, in the year 791/2). His rival Barlaam also wrote a treatise on the Easter computus, rigorously argued, in which he arrived at the same conclusion concerning the spring equinox, but he also pointed out another source of error, the inaccuracy of the 19-year cycle.⁵³ But while Gregoras preferred to reform the canon, Barlaam advocated keeping the ancient canon in order to avoid religious troubles. The question was again discussed by Nicholas Rhabdas, Isaac Argyros, and even Bessarion, in a letter to pope Paul II, without arriving at a resolution. But in the Palaiologan period the question of Easter seems to have been a powerful stimulus for astronomical studies within the Church.

⁵⁰ Grumel 1958; Mosshammer 2008. ⁵¹ Tihon 2004; Lempire 2007.

⁵² I.e. minus one three-hundredth of a day; Tihon 2011. ⁵³ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

At the dawn of the Renaissance, interest in astronomy was growing in the Byzantine world as everywhere in the European countries. Regardless of the practical side of calculating celestial events and planetary positions, one can see in the manuscripts of Ptolemy's works that the *Almagest* was intensively studied along with its commentaries and numerous scholia. Scholars or amateurs, some of them identified on palaeographic grounds, left a quantity of notes in the margins of the *Almagest*: John Katrarios (c. 1322); Nicholas Kabasilas (c. 1360), who wrote a book three to Theon's commentary on the *Almagest* (replacing the missing original); the priest Malachias (c. 1380), Nicholas (?) Eudaimonioiannes (fifteenth century), John Chortasmenos (c. 1415), and others who remain unknown. These notes contain many trigonometrical exercises and even sometimes new calculations. Some autographs of Bessarion show calculations written in Greek and in Latin: in Greek, trigonometrical exercises from the *Almagest*; in Latin, methods from al-Battānī, compared to Ptolemy's procedures. Such researches came to be important for understanding Ptolemy in the Renaissance.

Let us leave the last word to John Katrarios, who wrote the following at the end of his elegant copy of Theon's *Small Commentary* and of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* in Vat. Gr. 175:

*Katrarios' hands have completed this book,
 desiring the bright power of the celestial science,
 he studied it alone, not from someone else, and made exercises;
 he watched opportunities and finally knew the end,
 an. 6830 (= 1321/2).⁵⁴*

⁵⁴ Turyn 1964: table 190d.

CHAPTER 12
ASTROLOGY

PAUL MAGDALINO

The inclusion of a chapter on astrology in an intellectual history of Byzantium needs some justification. Astrology is widely perceived by intellectuals today, and especially by exact scientists, as a mindless superstition, and plenty of support for dismissing it as unscientific can be found in ancient and medieval literature too. Most Byzantine statements on astrology by non-astrologers are derisive as well as critical, perhaps the most memorable and eloquent being Niketas Choniates' reports of the consistently wrong astrological predictions in which the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) naively believed, and on which he persistently based his policies.¹ Yet Manuel wrote a treatise in *Defense of Astrology*, and whatever its intellectual merits, this treatise was at least an intellectual exercise.

Astrology had an enduring appeal at all levels of society because it used scientific methods and could be explained according to accepted scientific theories. It was impossible to practice astrology without a basic knowledge of astronomy; apart from the construction and correction of calendars, astrology was the only practical use to which the study of astronomy could be put.² The great second-century synthesizer of ancient astronomy, Ptolemy, assumed that the two went together and, in addition to his astronomical works, produced a treatise on astrology, the *Tetrabiblos*. The calculation of horoscopes depended on the exact mapping of the heavens at a given moment with arithmetical and geometrical precision; astrologers were frequently referred to as “mathematicians” (*mathematikoi*). The interpretation of a horoscope was a game of skill and judgment, which involved both the application of a rigorous logic and the consideration of many variables. It drew on the entire range of cosmological theories produced by the religious and philosophical systems of antiquity. It originated in Babylonian and, to a lesser extent, Egyptian religion, and its basic doctrine of planetary influences was linked to the identification of the planets with the Olympian gods Hermes (Mercury), Aphrodite

¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 95–96, 154, 169, 220–221 (tr. Magoulias); see Magdalino 1993a: 5–11.

² See also Chapter 11.

(Venus), Artemis (Diana – the Moon), Apollo (the Sun), Ares (Mars), Zeus (Jupiter), and Kronos (Saturn). It was based on the Stoic theory of cosmic sympathy, the idea that all the parts of the universe were interconnected and danced to the same tune.³ It shared the Pythagorean obsession with number symbolism and adopted Aristotle's theory of matter. Most importantly, it was fully consistent with Neoplatonism, the philosophical system that subsumed all other ancient cosmologies in its vision of a hierarchical, ordered universe descending and radiating from pure intellect to chaotic, corruptible matter through a chain of being in which the higher, heavenly, and spiritual beings transmitted order, meaning, and life to the lower elements, which in turn found immortality and fulfillment by striving to return to the celestial source of their existence.⁴ The Neoplatonic worldview formed the framework for all political and religious ideology in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and it found concrete expression in the conception of the universe as a series of concentric spheres, with the earth in the sub-lunar sphere of mutable matter at the center.

This model of a spherical, hierarchical, geocentric universe was precisely what gave astrology scientific credentials and intellectual appeal, since it presented the power and influence of the heavenly spheres on the sub-lunar sphere as self-evident. As the interpreter of the powers and configurations of the heavenly bodies, the astrologer could thus effectively set himself up as a mediator between the divine intellect, which imposed order and meaning on the heavens, and the world of matter that was governed by heavenly influences. It was this unstated pretension to superior knowledge that explains the vehemence with which astrology was denounced by other would-be mediators between the human and the divine, above all men of the Church. The Church was naturally wary of astrology's Hellenic (or broadly pagan) past, with what could be seen as a lingering tendency to deify the heavenly bodies, especially the planets that were named after Greek gods. Yet the argument that the agency of the stars in human and earthly affairs was natural rather than supernatural was hardly more reassuring. What the Church objected to in astrology even more than its residual paganism was its implicit fatalism. Following a line of criticism that originated in Epicurean philosophy, Christianity, like the other monotheistic religions, objected that by ascribing the cause of all events and actions to the stars, astrology denied the free choice and therefore the moral responsibility of human beings, and left no room for the intervention of Divine Providence.⁵ Thus critiques that dismissed astrology as mythological, mechanistic, superstitious, and puerile, were effectively attempts to trivialize an applied cosmological theory that offered a serious intellectual alternative to salvation through religious faith.

³ Jones 2003. ⁴ See Chapter 18. ⁵ Long 1982.

In other words, astrology was the scientific determinism of the ancient and medieval world, and the Orthodox monotheistic discourse that marginalized it indirectly paid tribute to its intellectual credentials.

The Orthodox discourse was common to Judaism, Islam, and all branches of Christianity. Yet it seems to have been particularly potent in the medieval Byzantine world, where Byzantine elite society was obsessively Orthodox, and the concentration of intellectual culture in Constantinople made it particularly dependent on the religious and political authorities. Moreover, Byzantine Orthodoxy seems to have been more resistant than either Islam or the other Christian traditions to the idea that astronomy and astrology were compatible with the worship of a transcendent God, that they led to the knowledge of the Creator through the decoding of the script that he had encrypted in the celestial lights of his creation. Thus elite Byzantine literature abounds in negative comments on astrology, and Byzantine intellectuals who should have had astrological interests consistently expressed an attitude of reticence or denial on the subject. Does this mean that astrology was indeed marginal to Byzantine intellectual life? Yes, in the sense that it rarely informed Byzantine philosophical discussion, or supplied metaphors for the conceptualization of human society. In this, it stood in contrast to medicine, the other professional, applied science with which it can be compared: intellectuals who were not doctors were proud to show off their medical knowledge, and the language of healing, surgery, and medication permeates their writing. Yet the analogy between astrology as applied astronomy and medicine as applied physics, in the Aristotelian sense, should not be overlooked, nor should the assumption of astral influences in medical theory. Astrology and medicine were both concerned with the effects of cosmic sympathy on the material existence of man; both interpreted the interface between the hierarchical macrocosm and the human microcosm. In this interpretation, both were equally fallible, but both were equally irreplaceable, however much the Church tried to replace them with the miraculous cures and prophecies of the saints. The image of the astrologer in Byzantine literature is not so different from that of the medical doctor, even though the status of the former in Byzantine society was not so well defined by titles and positions.

This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that astrology deserves recognition as an integral and essential part of Byzantine intellectual life, comparable to medicine, despite the lower profile that was imposed on it by Orthodox discourse. Its intellectual presence is visible in (1) the technical literature that survives in the form of manuals, treatises, and horoscopes; (2) historical references to individual astrologers; (3) the occasional treatise in defense of astrology; (4) the non-professional interest in and knowledge of astrology betrayed by other intellectuals; (5) the frequency of

disparaging comments about astrology, which, it will be argued, reflect the importance rather than the unimportance of astrological activity and thought.

TECHNICAL LITERATURE

In ancient Alexandria, the rudiments of astrology were taught with astronomy as part of the mathematical curriculum, and we have no reason to suppose that this changed in medieval Constantinople. Astrology resembled other academic disciplines in that it was based on a corpus of specialist textbooks and handbooks written in the period of the Second Sophistic and in late antiquity. We have already mentioned Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*; other works known to have been read in Byzantium are the *Astrological Poem* of Dorotheos of Sidon (first century CE), the *Anthologies* of Ptolemy's contemporary Vettius Valens, the *Introduction* of Paul of Alexandria (378), the slightly later *Apotelesmatika* of Hephaestion of Thebes, and the sixth- or seventh-century *Compendium of the Astrological Art* by the Egyptian Rhetorios. This literature was supplemented in the Byzantine period by a large corpus of treatises and manuals that are listed and partially edited in the *Corpus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*. They form a vast miscellany of works of different length, some derived from the ancient texts, others introduced from Persian and Arabic astrology. Most are anonymous and undated, but a few bear the names of individual astrologers and can be dated precisely by the horoscopes they include. Among the larger works, one may cite the voluminous translations of the prolific Arab astrologer Abū Ma'shar (787–886),⁶ and the verse *Introduction to Astrology* by John Kamateros (twelfth century). The critical publication and analysis of this literature was interrupted by the death in 2005 of its great scholarly interpreter, David Pingree. We are still very far from being able to determine whether Byzantium made its own original contribution to astrological theory in addition to the methods that it derived from antiquity and the “moderns,” i.e. contemporary Arabs and Persians, but one innovation of the eleventh century was perhaps a local invention, or at least a Byzantine adaptation of an imported technique. This was the so-called oracular method, which according to Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* was perfected by the astrologer Seth.⁷ The technique is described in an anonymous treatise citing examples from horoscopes of the mid-twelfth century.⁸ It consisted in feeding the letters of a given question, as numerical values, into a series of

⁶ Pingree 1968; Yamamoto and Burnett 2000.

⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7.1–7; see Magdalino 2003b.

⁸ This unpublished treatise exists in three versions: Magdalino 2006a: 98.

computations involving the numerical values of the ascendant sign of the zodiac, the planet of the day and the hour, and the positions of the Sun and Moon at the time of inquiry. From these computations emerges a series of numbers that convert into the letters of the answer.

INDIVIDUAL ASTROLOGERS

It can be assumed that astrologers were active throughout the eastern empire in late antiquity, despite the punitive legislation that was sometimes applied against them.⁹ Justinian, in particular, persecuted those of Constantinople and Athens, forcing many to emigrate beyond the frontiers or to distant provinces.¹⁰ Yet some were active in Constantinople toward the end of his reign, and others are attested in Antioch, Alexandria, and Smyrna. A few late antique astrologers are known to us by name. They included, obviously, the teachers and authors of didactic texts, such as Porphyry, Paul, and Theon of Alexandria, Theon's daughter Hypatia, and Rhetorios; they also included some men of high social status, such as the two imperial officials who interpreted a star as heralding the death of the emperor Maurice, and the Alexandrian ex-prefect Nemesion who vainly sought a cure for his blindness from the martyrs Cyrus and John.¹¹

The seventh and eighth centuries are an obscure period for astrology, as for astronomy and other forms of secular learning in Byzantium. The period began with a burst of intellectual revival, in which astrology may have played a part, and may even have received an official boost by the emperor Herakleios (610–641). In 617–618 or shortly afterwards, Herakleios commissioned a companion to the use of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*, which among other things adapted them for use in the latitude and longitude of Constantinople.¹² It has been suggested that Herakleios, who gained a reputation as an astrologer in later centuries, wanted to use astrology as “information technology” in the empire's titanic conflict with Sasanian Persia, employing as his collaborator Stephanos the Alexandrian philosopher, whom one manuscript names as the author of the guide to the *Handy Tables*.¹³ Despite a recent attempt, by a historian of Byzantine philosophy, to write Stephanos out of the narrative,¹⁴ historians of Byzantine science continue to accept that he brought Alexandrian astronomy to Constantinople under Herakleios.¹⁵ While skepticism with regard to his role as an astrologer may be in order, it does not adequately account for the contemporary interest in the *Handy Tables*, an

⁹ Fögen 1993. ¹⁰ Prokopios, *Secret History* 11.37–40.

¹¹ Sophronios, *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John* 294–298; for other references, see Magdalino 2006a: 27–29.

¹² Tihon 2004. ¹³ Magdalino 2006a: 33–39, based on Wolska-Conus 1989. ¹⁴ Roueché 2011.

¹⁵ Lempire 2011.

indispensable reference tool for astrologers, or indeed the general interest in astronomy at the time. We shall return to this interest; for now, we may note that whether or not the astronomical activity under Herakleios was astrologically motivated, it was short-lived. In both astronomy and astrology, there is a long gap between that reign and the late eighth century, punctuated only by the mention of an astronomer/astrologer monk called Paul in the 690s.¹⁶ Astronomy picks up again with a series of scholia dating from 775 to 812, and with the production, in the early ninth century, of the two oldest surviving manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*.¹⁷ This coincides with a cluster of astrological data from around the same time: the mention of a court astrologer, Pankratios, who died in 792 in a battle whose outcome he had wrongly predicted;¹⁸ a treatise in defense of astrology by an author who calls himself Stephanos and says that he has recently arrived from Persia;¹⁹ and the *Horoscope of Islam*, supposedly an astrological forecast of the rise of the Prophet Muhammad and the reigns of the first twenty caliphs.²⁰ This famous piece of astrological fiction, which was much cited by Byzantine authors in the tenth century, purports to be the work of Stephanos the Alexandrian philosopher dating from the year 622. Yet it is clear from the chronicle of the caliphs that it must have been written shortly after 775, the year of the death of the Abbasid al-Mahdi, the last ruler whose dates are given correctly. The combined evidence of these data strongly suggests that the revival of Byzantine astrology in the last quarter of the eighth century was inspired by the flourishing of astrology at the court of the Abbasid caliphs in their newly founded capital at Baghdad (762).²¹

Following this revival, astrology was a permanent if intermittently visible presence in Byzantium. In the ninth century, it was represented by the polymath Leo the Philosopher or Mathematician and his students, one of whom allegedly was taken as a prisoner to Baghdad and so impressed the court with his knowledge that the caliph offered the teacher a job.²² From the tenth century we have the anonymous birth horoscope of Constantine VII (905),²³ and anecdotal references to a number of astrological experts at the imperial court. Pantaleon, bishop of Synada, was summoned by Leo VI in 907–908 to explain what was portended by a lunar eclipse.²⁴ In 927, the “astronomer” John identified a statue in the hippodrome as the talisman of the empire's arch-enemy, Symeon of Bulgaria,

¹⁶ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 368.

¹⁷ Magdalino 2006a: 55; the manuscripts are Vat. Gr. 1291 and Leid. BPG 78; see Tihon 1992. For the date of the Vaticanus, see Janz 2003.

¹⁸ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 467–468.

¹⁹ *CCAG* 2, pp. 181–186; Pingree 1989; Magdalino 2006a: 19–22.

²⁰ *Horoscope of Islam* 266–289; see Roueché 2011. ²¹ Pingree 1989; 2001; Gutas 1998: 175–186.

²² Magdalino 1998. ²³ Pingree 1973. ²⁴ *Theophanes Continuatus* 376.

who duly died when the statue was decapitated.²⁵ In 975, the emperor John I Tzimiskes consulted two high-ranking experts, Stephanos, bishop of Nikomedeia, and Symeon the Logothete, on the significance of a comet.²⁶ It is remarkable that the consultations of 907–908 and 975 both involved churchmen, and that the layman also consulted in 975 was a hagiographer renowned for his ascetic piety. Neither consultation, however, required the casting of a horoscope that would predict a personal destiny; they were concerned with the cosmic significance of extraordinary natural phenomena, which was a type of astrology admitted by the Church.

From the late tenth century, the pace of recorded astrological activity intensifies. An unprecedented cluster of horoscopes and other dated observations, all of them anonymous, survives from the years around the turn of the millennium, broadly coinciding with the earliest translations of Arabic texts.²⁷ For the rest of the eleventh century and the early years of the twelfth, we have fewer horoscopes, but several dated observations and more names, in addition to the anonymous mentions of court astrologers consulted in the political crises of 1042 and 1078.²⁸ The named individuals are a certain Theodosios in 1065,²⁹ Eleutherios Zebelenos,³⁰ Symeon Seth,³¹ Telmouses,³² Katananges,³³ Theodore Chryselios,³⁴ and Theodore the Alexandrian, famous for his “magically” accurate predictions of the outcomes of chariot races in the hippodrome.³⁵ To this list we should probably add the name of Sergios the Persian, the owner and maker of the only extant Byzantine astrolabe, who signed his instrument in the year 1062.³⁶

Four of these names are known from the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene, written in the years around 1148.³⁷ She records them in order to make the point that there was no lack of astrologers during the reign of her father, Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), and she makes this point in order to prove that even in this, he did not fall short of his grandson, Manuel I, under whom she was writing. Manuel’s exceptional devotion to astrology and astrologers is well attested by three sources: the didactic verse *Introduction to Astrology* that John Kamateros dedicated to him; the defense of astrology that he himself composed, and which we shall consider shortly; and the mordant critique by Niketas Choniates, according to whom Manuel consulted the astrologers in every important decision and event.³⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.* 383–384. ²⁶ Leo the Deacon, *History* 68. ²⁷ Magdalino 2006a: 92–93; Pingree 1997.

²⁸ 1042: Psellos, *Chronographia* 5.18–19; 1078: Attaleiates, *History* 185.

²⁹ *CCAG* 2, p. 213; Pingree 1997: 66. ³⁰ *CCAG* 5.1, pp. 227–228; *CCAG* 2, pp. 132–136.

³¹ Magdalino 2003b: 19–21; 2006a: 100. ³² Pingree 1976: 192; Magdalino 2002: 53–54.

³³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7. ³⁴ Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Letter* 127 (pp. 570–579).

³⁵ *CCAG* 8.1, pp. 197–198; Wuilleumier 1927: 186–189. ³⁶ Dalton 1926.

³⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7.1–7; Magdalino 2003b.

³⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 95–96, 154, 169, 220–221; Magdalino 1993a: 5–6, 7–8, 11; 2006a: 109–111.

Although Choniates does not name the astrologers in question, it is possible to identify some of them with a high degree of plausibility. He mentions two highly regarded astrologers in his narrative of later reigns: Constantine Stethatos (1187) and Alexios Kontostephanos (1195).³⁹ Two individuals whom Manuel condemned for sorcery might previously have served him as astrologers: Skleros Seth and Michael Sikidites, alias Glykas.⁴⁰ Another obvious candidate is John Kamateros, author of the *Introduction to Astrology*.

One is struck, in looking at this list, by the number of distinguished Byzantine family names (all apart from Sikidites), and by the fact that all the individuals named are laymen. Yet having said this, it is important to note that John Kamateros may have ended his career as archbishop of Bulgaria; a treatise addressed to the patriarch of Constantinople, Luke Chrysoberges, refers to “your astrology”;⁴¹ and if we are to believe a mocking piece by Nicholas Mesarites (his *Ethopoia*), an astrologer almost became patriarch of Antioch at the end of the twelfth century.

Real or imaginary, this figure of fun is the last astrologer to be mentioned in Byzantine sources for over a hundred years. The thirteenth century is a complete blank in the annals of Byzantine astrology. Like other learned professions, astrology suffered from the destructive and disruptive Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204. It probably suffered more than most, since there can be little doubt that astrology was identified as one of the sins that had offended God and caused him to allow the disaster to happen. However, the scientific basis of astrology did not disappear from the school curriculum that was revived in the Byzantine empire-in-exile in western Asia Minor, and it was strengthened by the considerable investment in culture that followed the recovery of Constantinople in 1261. Astrology undoubtedly benefited from, if it did not actually provoke, the dramatic revival of interest in astronomy at the court of the emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328) under the stimulus of new contacts with Islamic science at the court of the Mongol khans of Persia.⁴² The *terminus ante quem* for the revival of astrology is the mention of a horoscope cast for the emperor in 1321. Thereafter, a series of astrologers are known to us from their surviving works: the priest Manuel at Trebizond (1336); the doctor George Chrysokokkes who went to study with him; the cleric Demetrios Chloros; John Abramios, astrological advisor to Andronikos IV Palaiologos; his pupil Eleutherios Elios, and the latter’s pupil Dionysios.⁴³ These late Byzantine astrologers are

³⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 388, 455–456.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 147–150; Magdalino 1993a: 198–200, 379–380. ⁴¹ *CCAG* 4, pp. 156–158; Caudano 2011.

⁴² These contacts happened mainly, though not exclusively, through George/Gregory Chioniades: Pingree 1964; Bydén in Theodore Metochites, *Elements of Astronomy* 241–250; Tihon 2006: 273–280.

⁴³ Pingree 1971; Tihon 2006.

significant not only for their work as interpreters of contemporary events, but also for the many older texts they copied. In fact, the most important legacy, and proof, of the revival of astrology in the last century and a half of Byzantium is the number of manuscripts dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the high proportion of earlier material surviving only in manuscripts of this period.

TREATISES DEFENDING ASTROLOGY

Whatever the Byzantine contribution to the intellectual content of astrology, Byzantium pioneered one notable contribution to its intellectual image. This was the defense of astrology in religious terms, the attempt to present it as fully compatible with orthodox Christian belief by arguing that what it studied was not the agency of the stars as animate, divine beings, but their operation as tools with which God had created the universe and as signifiers of his divine plan. The elements of this apologia had existed in the early Church: in the teaching of Bardaisan of Edessa (154–222) that the stars affected the human body, and the fate of nations, but not the individual soul; in the Neoplatonic cosmology of Origen, who allowed that the heavens were like a book in which the angels could read the mind of God; and in the Gospel story of the Magi, who recognized the significance of the Star of Bethlehem because of their knowledge of astrology (Matthew 2:2).⁴⁴ However, Bardaisan, Origen, and the Magi were all marginalized in the Orthodox discourse of the post-Nicene Church Fathers, and Christians of the fourth to sixth centuries who had recourse to astrology were apparently content to externalize it as a pagan or crypto-pagan activity.

This changed in the seventh and eighth centuries with the extinction of paganism and with the crisis of the Christian empire's fight for survival, first against Persia (home of the Magi), and then against the Arab caliphates, which inherited the Persian tradition of political astrology. Later tradition placed the turning point in the reign of Herakleios, the emperor who managed the first phase of the crisis. The emperor himself was portrayed as an astrologer who said, according to one version, that "those who had no use for astrology were refusing to read the writings of God."⁴⁵ The *Horoscope of Islam*, purporting to be a work of the contemporary philosopher Stephanos of Alexandria dating from 622, begins with a lengthy theoretical justification of astrology as the culmination of higher education.⁴⁶ It is possible that these texts carry genuine echoes of an official

⁴⁴ Drijvers 1966; Scott 1994; Molnar 1999; Ramelli 2009; Possekkel 2012.

⁴⁵ Psellos, *Brief History* 76; Roueché 2011: 27–29.

⁴⁶ *Horoscope of Islam* 266–289, especially 271–273.

adoption of astrology at the height of the Persian war with the aim of beating the Persians at their own game of “star wars.” As we shall see, there is strong circumstantial evidence for the existence of an astrological culture in Herakleios’ Constantinople. However, given the lateness of the direct evidence, all we can conclude for certain is that at some later stage it became important for Byzantine astrologers to seek the beginnings of their “rehabilitation” in the time of Herakleios and to associate it with the name of a distinguished Alexandrian professor. From the *Horoscope of Islam*, it is clear that this tradition was being discovered, or invented, before the text was finalized in the years after 775, and the motive is not hard to find: to give the political predictions concerning the fate of the caliphate a Roman, Christian, and Alexandrian pedigree.

This being so, we should focus attention on the first systematic Christian defense of astrology that can be dated with any certainty. It was written by the Syrian Christian polymath Theophilus of Edessa (695–785), best known to recent scholarship as the author of a now-lost history that was extensively excerpted by later historians.⁴⁷ Theophilus was also one of the chief astrologers at the Abbasid court, serving the caliphs al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdi, and the author of astrological handbooks.⁴⁸ It was presumably in order to justify this activity in the eyes of his own Syriac Christian community that he wrote two treatises in defense of astrology, one of which still survives.⁴⁹ However, since Theophilus was a Monothelite Christian who wrote in Greek, he may well also have written with an eye to readers in Byzantium. His works soon became known in Constantinople, quite possibly by way of a younger contemporary, who shared the same background and ideas, as is clear from the treatise on the merits of astrology that he wrote about 790.⁵⁰

The author, who calls himself Stephanos the Philosopher, describes himself as an immigrant from Persia (no doubt Baghdad) to “this fortunate city,” presumably Constantinople, where he has found “the astronomical and astrological part of philosophy to be extinguished.” He has therefore decided to revive it by computing a new set of tables to incorporate the corrections that the “moderns” (i.e. the Arabs) have made to the *Handy Tables* of Ptolemy. This is necessary for the Romans to regain world supremacy from the Arabs, because history has shown that the leading world power has always been in control of astrology. Having demonstrated the political necessity of astrology, Stephanos proceeds to the moral justification. Not only is the “mathematical art” not a sin, as long as we treat the heavenly bodies as tools and do not worship them like the Hellenes; it is sinful, indeed blasphemous, *not* to study their effects upon

⁴⁷ Teule 2009; Hoyland 2011. ⁴⁸ Pingree 2001: 13–20 ⁴⁹ *CCAG* 5, pp. 234–238.

⁵⁰ *CCAG* 2, pp. 181–186; Pingree 1989; Magdalino 2006a: 19–22.

the earth that God has placed at their center. Astrology is in fact the greatest of all the sciences, because it is the most universal, and the most honorable by virtue of the fact that it looks into the future, like God, and studies the things that are closest to God.

Stephanos' call for the political revival of astrology seems to have taken practical effect by 792, when Constantine VI used the services of the astrologer Pankratios in his wars against the Bulgars.⁵¹ Whether his theoretical arguments were also taken up is hard to estimate from the absence of any echoes from the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. Nor is it clear to what extent his treatise and those of Theophilos of Edessa were circulating in the twelfth century when the emperor Manuel I Komnenos decided to make a new, public defense of astrology under his own name.⁵² Manuel follows the same line of argument that we find in the eighth-century authors: astrology is not impious, because it does not worship the stars as supernatural beings, but studies them as signs and agents created by God for the benefit of mankind, so to ignore their messages and effects is to spurn the divine invitation. However, Manuel develops this argument further, with additional ideas and with many supporting examples not previously cited. It is likely, therefore, that his apologia was based primarily not on his reading of previous apologists, but on his own reflections and his discussions with the astrologers whom he consulted and who, we may reasonably conjecture, deployed a mixed oral and written tradition of professional self-defense that they had learned along with their technical expertise.

Manuel's main theoretical contribution to the debate is to clarify and extend the definition of astrology as a natural science specializing, like medicine, in natural and therefore fallible, though divinely created phenomena. He emphasizes that scientific astrology is distinct not only from pagan religion but also from any kind of magic and sorcery that invokes the power of the stars by incantation; here it is interesting to note that Manuel inflicted severe punishments on men who professed to be astrologers but were accused of magical practices.⁵³ At the same time, Manuel makes a clear distinction between the natural, predictable operation of the stars, and the providential intervention of God, which can suspend or override this operation at any time. Thus when astrology gets it wrong, this is either because the agency of the stars is naturally variable, like the procreative power of sperm, or because God, influenced by prayer, has decided to work a miracle.

Manuel wrote his treatise explicitly to refute a monk who had criticized astrologers as heretics. He therefore cites many examples from the Bible,

⁵¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 467–468.

⁵² Manuel I Komnenos, *Defense of Astrology*; Magdalino 2006a: 113–121.

⁵³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 147–150.

from the Fathers, and from history to demonstrate that astrology has consistently been regarded as legitimate in orthodox Christian tradition. These citations were for the most part badly chosen, and their authority was completely demolished in a savage critique by Michael Glykas, an ex-astrologer and imperial secretary turned monk and theologian.⁵⁴ Glykas' refutation undoubtedly dealt a blow to the ideological status of astrology from which the practice of astrology in Byzantium took a long time to recover, compounded as it was by the further ideological blow of the Fourth Crusade. Yet Glykas did not take issue with the theoretical arguments of Manuel's treatise, which found a ready reception in the fourteenth century when Byzantine astrology revived. The revival was ideological as well as practical, and it was fed by a growing conception, among intellectuals at the time of Andronikos II, that the mathematical sciences were a necessary stage in the elevation of the intellect to the contemplation of God.⁵⁵ One author explicitly identifies astrology as the key science in this anagogical process: the anonymous *Hermippos* goes further than any previous apologia in that he exalts astrology not just as a source of God-given beneficial knowledge, but as the ultimate religious experience.

Hermippos is in fact the most explicit manifestation in Byzantium of what we might call a culture of astrology or an astrological mentality: a knowledge of astrology and an outlook on the world that accepted the cosmological premises of astrology without necessarily involving the casting of horoscopes. The uniqueness and lateness of the *Hermippos*, and the paucity of Byzantine literature sympathetic to astrology, could easily give the impression that such a culture or mentality was anything but pervasive. Indeed, the very existence of an apologetic literature might seem to demonstrate that astrology, like prostitution, had to apologize for its illegitimate, marginal existence, which it owed entirely to the services that it rendered and not to the principles on which it was based. However, such a view is contradicted by the image of astrology in non-astrological literature. When taken in its ensemble, this proves that the intellectual basis and the technical vocabulary of astrology were both current and tacitly accepted in cultured circles, even when the pretensions and predictions of astrologers were vociferously dismissed and scorned. To appreciate this point, we have to think of astrology as "the elephant in the room" of Byzantine intellectual discourse, as a powerful, looming presence whose shape and dimensions are marked, on the one hand, by careful circumvention of the space that they occupy, and, on the other hand, by pointed denial of their importance and their right to exist.

⁵⁴ Glykas, *Refutation*; see Magdalino 2006a: 122–126. ⁵⁵ Magdalino 2006a: 151–162.

NON-PROFESSIONAL INTEREST IN ASTROLOGY

Knowledge, if not acceptance, of astrology may be assumed in writings where astrology is the missing ingredient in the recipe. This is often the case when references to an education in astronomy either fail to mention astrology or pointedly assert that the student had no use for it – an assertion clearly addressing the expectation that it would normally be taught, and that this was the main point of studying “mathematics.” Discussions of cosmology that stress the harmony and integration of the cosmos but refrain from inferring the validity of astrology are arguably leaving this up to the reader, while leaving more or less discreet clues: fairly discreet in the poetic *Hexaemeron* of George of Pisidia;⁵⁶ fairly obvious in the poems of Leo Choïrosphaktes,⁵⁷ the treatises of Symeon Seth,⁵⁸ and the history and letters of Nikephoros Gregoras.⁵⁹ In this connection, we should also note that all Byzantine intellectuals who explicitly or implicitly adhered to the spherical model of the universe, as propounded by Ptolemy, were effectively endorsing the cosmology that made astrology possible. This began in sixth-century Alexandria with John Philoponos, who defended the spherical model against the “flat-earth theory” of Kosmas Indikopleustes.⁶⁰ Although Philoponos denounced the “hard” astrology of birth horoscopes, he followed Origen in accepting that the stars could be signs, and he must have known that in defending the cosmology of Ptolemy (who saw astrology as applied astronomy) he was keeping science safe for astrologers.⁶¹ Despite his efforts, the flat-earth theory, which was rooted in the biblical exegesis of the Antiochene Church Fathers, including St. John Chrysostom, did not go away. It was kept going in *catena* commentaries and it was strongly reiterated, with scientific arguments, in the mid-twelfth century by a self-professed opponent of astrology, Peter the Philosopher.⁶² The appearance of his treatise at this time, when astrology was controversially being promoted by the imperial patronage and authorship of Manuel I Komnenos, cannot have been fortuitous. It implicitly labeled the protagonists of Ptolemaic astronomy as accomplices in the maintenance of classical astrology.

The culture of astrology is also reflected by some authors who simply mention astrological data without any commentary. The most prolific record of this kind is contained in two fragmentarily preserved treatises

⁵⁶ George of Pisidia, *Hexaemeron*; see Magdalino 2006a: 40–42.

⁵⁷ Choïrosphaktes, *Poem on the Bath of the Emperor Leo* and *Theological Poem*; see Magdalino 2006a: 71–76.

⁵⁸ Symeon Seth, *Treatises on Physics and Astronomy* and *On the Fixed Stars*; see Magdalino 2002, 2003b, and 2006a: 100–106.

⁵⁹ Gregoras, *Letters* 28, 53, 69; and *Roman History* 1.1 (v. 1, 3–5); 11.11 (v. 1, 559); 25.11 (v. 3, 32–33).

⁶⁰ Wolska 1962. ⁶¹ John Philoponos, *On the Creation of the World* 3.8, 4.18–20.

⁶² Caudano 2008 and 2011.

by the sixth-century writer John the Lydian, *On Signs* and *On the Months*. On a much smaller scale, historians occasionally record the occurrence of a significant conjunction: thus Theophanes, in the last pages of his chronicle, records two solar eclipses, noting that the second eclipse, on 4 May 813, occurred when the sun was in the fourteenth degree of Taurus,⁶³ and Michael Attaleiates notes that the major rebellion of Leo Tornikes against Constantine IX broke out on 14 September 1047, when Saturn was in conjunction with Jupiter.⁶⁴ The twelfth-century verse chronicle of Constantine Manasses narrates several astrological predictions in the course of Roman and Byzantine history, and points out that all of them came true.⁶⁵ In a different vein, archbishop Eustathios of Thessalonike, in his treatise on the reformation of the monastic life, develops a long comparison between monks and stars, and exhorts the former to take their appointed places in the configuration of ascetic lights, imitating the virtues and avoiding the bad qualities of the planets, zodiacal signs, and other constellations.⁶⁶ And in the popular legend of the foundation of Constantinople that crystallized in the tenth century, Constantine the Great is presented, anachronistically, as engaging the services of the famous second-century astrologer Vettius Valens to cast the horoscope of his new Christian capital.⁶⁷ The horoscope itself duly appeared at the end of the tenth century, predicting a date for the end of Constantinople that was perfectly in line with contemporary religious expectations of the imminent end of the world.⁶⁸ This was not the only instance of astronomy and astrology being invoked to give scientific credibility to Christian eschatological prophecy.⁶⁹

DISPARAGING COMMENTS ABOUT ASTROLOGY

Yet the great majority of references to astrology in Byzantine literature are negative. They mostly repeat a version of the Orthodox discourse that astrology taught the Necessity of the Fate written in the stars, denying human free will and divine providence. The mythological associations of the planets, the picturesque names of the zodiacal signs, and the technical terminology of astral configurations were also matter for scorn, as was the basic characteristic that they all appeared to confirm: the fallibility of astrological predictions, and the self-delusion of astrologers. Moreover,

⁶³ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 495, 500. ⁶⁴ Attaleiates, *History* 18.

⁶⁵ Constantine Manasses, *Summary Chronicle*, lines 1843–1847 (p. 99), 2035–2038a (p. 109), 2954–2960b (p. 162).

⁶⁶ Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Visitation of the Monastic Life* 191–194 (pp. 216–225).

⁶⁷ Kedrenos, *Summary Historical Compilation*, v. 1, 497–498.

⁶⁸ Pingree 1977; Magdalino 2003a: 243–244, 259–262; 2006a: 87–88.

⁶⁹ Gregory 1984; Magdalino 2008: 124

astrology was liable to be condemned not only as impious and fallacious, but also as illegal, according to legislation going back to Diocletian and incorporated via the *Codex Iustinianus* (9.18.2) into the middle Byzantine legal corpus, the *Basilika* (60.39.23).⁷⁰ The law outlawed all “mathematicians” on pain of death, and was presumably the basis for the persecution of astrologers by Justinian. In the late twelfth century, the canonist Theodore Balsamon quoted it in support of the conciliar canon (Laodicaea Can. 36) that prohibited mathematicians and astrologers from being ordained to the priesthood. Glossing “mathematicians,” he ruled that while the prohibition did not apply to the mathematical sciences of arithmetic, geometry, and music, the fourth member of the *quadrivium*, astronomy, was forbidden in its entirety.⁷¹

In thus making no distinction between legitimate astronomy and illegitimate astrology, Balsamon went to an unprecedented extreme that no doubt reflected the extreme reaction of the Orthodox discourse to the recent, flagrant promotion of astrology by Manuel I. But it also reflected recognition of the cultural reality that underlay the notional, artificial separation of astrology and astronomy: that knowledge of the movements of the heavenly bodies was inseparable from curiosity about their relationship with the earth. Balsamon was being more realistic, as well as more legalistic, than his slightly earlier predecessor John Zonaras, who upheld the traditional separation of the two. Both, however, were reacting against the common currency of astrology by criminalizing it, rather than devaluing it as a medium of explanation and prediction. None of the critics of astrology was able to prove the total fallacy of astral causation and astral signification, still less to prove that the agency of the stars was not divinely ordained. It was easy to fault individual astrologers for their foibles and mistakes, but impossible to refute their rationale.

Indeed, one often gets the impression that a frontal attack on the presumption and fallibility of astrology in practice, particularly in birth horoscopes, could serve as a cover for knowledge and even acceptance of astrological theory. A number of major Byzantine cultural figures send conflicting signals about their attitudes. This begins with the Church Fathers. Gregory of Nyssa wrote a treatise *Against Fate*, refuting an astrologer who uses the Stoic argument that “the cosmos is coherent in itself,”⁷² yet in his own exposition of the Creation (*Hexaemeron*), Gregory used exactly the same expression in a positive sense.⁷³ We have already

⁷⁰ See also the *Theodosian Code* 9.16.8 (Valentinian and Valens); 9.16.12 (Honorius and Theodosius II); Fögen 1993: 20–26.

⁷¹ Theodore Balsamon, *Commentary on the Council of Laodicaea* 204–205, and *On the Prohibition against Reading Mathematical Books*.

⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Fate* 37–38; see Motta 2008.

⁷³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Hexaemeron* 48 (p. 61).

mentioned George of Pisidia, who makes dismissive comments on astrologers within the context of an elaborate evocation of cosmic sympathy. Leo the Deacon rejects the “mathematical” explanation of earthquakes, while criticizing two astrological experts for not explaining a comet “as their art required.”⁷⁴ Michael Psellos and Anna Komnene make highly ambiguous remarks about the astrologers of their day, trivializing them and their science, while letting it be known that they themselves are experts and that astrological forecasts can come true.⁷⁵ Michael Glykas, as we have seen, was the foremost critic of Manuel I’s defense of astrology, yet he did not take issue with the idea of astral influences, and actually supported this in a letter to an inquirer.⁷⁶ Other contemporaries dealt with the vogue for astrology by debunking it with satirical humour, more reminiscent of anti-clericalism than of clerical censorship.⁷⁷ Around 1300, George Pachymeres, in his mathematical treatise, came out strongly against the astrology of birth horoscopes, yet in his *History* he recorded disasters that were portended by comets, an eclipse that announced the death of an emperor, and a bright appearance of Saturn that was correctly interpreted as a sign of the imminent fall of leading churchmen.⁷⁸ Finally, Theodore Metochites, in the introduction to his treatise on Ptolemaic astronomy, distinguishes this clearly from astrology, which is suspect on religious grounds; however, he goes on to state that the influence of the Sun, the Moon, and astral configurations on earthly affairs is undeniable.

CONCLUSION

In Byzantium professional astrologers must have made their living and their reputation principally by casting personal horoscopes, a preponderance that is confirmed by the bulk of the surviving technical literature. Yet it was precisely individual horoscopes, and particularly nativities, that attracted condemnation by the Orthodox discourse, because they appeared to be driven by fatalist and determinist belief. In non-technical literature, therefore, Byzantine astrological culture is most visible in its negative reflection, in criticism of astral determinism, and in invective against the error and presumption of individual horoscopic predictions. Where astrology appears in a positive or neutral light, it is generally in non-specific references to astral influence and cosmic sympathy, or in cases of political astrology: predictions (mainly based on comets and eclipses) pertaining to the fate of rulers and nations.

⁷⁴ Leo the Deacon, *History* 68, 168, 172–176; see Magdalino 2006b: 135–139.

⁷⁵ Psellos, *Chronographia* 5.19–20, 6A.10–12; Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7.1–7; see Magdalino 2003b, 2006a: 93–105, and 2006b: 136–146.

⁷⁶ Glykas, *Responses*, v. 1, 468–475; see Magdalino 2006a: 123–124. ⁷⁷ Magdalino 2015a.

⁷⁸ Tihon 2006: 271–273.

Like the other arts and sciences that had flourished in late antiquity, astrological culture had its ups and downs in Byzantium. Its high points were the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, its lows the thirteenth and the greater part of the seventh and eighth centuries. A question mark hangs over the reign of Herakleios: did this witness a continuation, in Constantinople, of the astronomical-astrological tradition of sixth-century Alexandria? Did it, even, produce an officially sponsored burst of political astrology in response to the “star wars” being waged by the king of Persia and his Magi? As we have seen, the evidence for the astrological expertise and partnership of Herakleios and Stephanos of Alexandria is fragile, suspect, and late. At the same time, the evidence for the study and application of astronomy in Herakleios’ reign is remarkable and reliable. In addition to the composition of a user’s guide to Ptolemy’s *Handy Tables*, we may mention the elaborate chronological computations of the *Easter Chronicle*, the scientific cosmology of George of Pisidia’s *Hexaemeron*, and the indications, from as far apart as Armenia and Anglo-Saxon England, that the mathematical *quadrivium* was taught in Constantinople for a ten-year period by a philosopher from Athens. One of his students, Tychikos, returned to teach in Trebizond, and had a large library that included many books of occult science.⁷⁹ Another, Theodore of Tarsus, went on to become the first archbishop of Canterbury, as well as a teacher of mathematics, whose student Aldhelm recalled his “expertise in the art of astrology” and his skill “in the complex computation of the horoscope.”⁸⁰ Whether or not the Athenian philosopher was Stephanos of Alexandria does not much matter; what is significant is that neither his astrology nor even his existence are reliably attested in Byzantine Greek sources. This reveals a characteristic dimension of Byzantine intellectual history that is not confined to astrology.

⁷⁹ Greenwood 2011: 139–141, 146–156. ⁸⁰ Lapidge 1995: 1–19, especially 17–18.

CHAPTER 13
MAGIC AND THE OCCULT SCIENCES

RICHARD GREENFIELD

The Byzantines lived in a world that was almost unimaginably unpredictable and insecure. At every level of society and in almost every aspect of life, everything could change overnight. Quite apart from the more obvious issues of natural disaster, political instability, and hostile incursion there were the everyday factors of disease, accident, and, for most people, borderline subsistence, coupled with all the usual human problems of social competition and interaction. Lacking modern scientific understanding and lacking swift or reliable means of communication or for gathering and analyzing information, people in the Byzantine world inherited, developed, and relied on a wide range of other methods for coping, not only in practical terms but also intellectually. Among them were magic and the occult sciences.

At the intellectual level, the most dominant and pervasive approach to dealing with the world and its issues was the set of beliefs and attitudes that came to be embodied in Orthodox Christianity. These provided reassurance at the highest possible level that life, however it might seem, was neither arbitrary nor malevolent. The world was created and constantly controlled by an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent God. Everything that happened, great or small, happened according to His plan and so, no matter how bad things might appear in general or at an individual level, they were part of an overarching pattern that was both meaningful and good. In this world the Byzantines, being Roman and Christian, happily occupied center stage: even when things appeared to have gone wrong, God was simply testing or punishing His chosen people. And the spiritual forces of evil, the demons and their general, Satan, were part of that plan. Having been created angels, they were superior in some ways to humans and were thought to have exercised a dominant control over them for millennia in the past; but now, since the crucial shift in cosmic history produced by the Incarnation, people were assured that these malevolent powers were inferior to them in most important ways, so that determined faith and correct behavior rendered them impotent.¹

¹ Mango 1980: 151–163; 1992; Greenfield 1988; Troianos 2008.

But here lay a problem. People may take comfort from knowing that they are part of the greater good but, if their day-to-day individual experience is persistently too uncertain and miserable and, moreover, if they are denied the ability to do anything about it, that comfort may be seriously diminished. Thus, although people were held to possess free will and so necessarily remained responsible for their actions, according to the orthodox view it was almost impossible to exercise that will for good by themselves and it was actually impossible to make God do anything He did not want to do. It is true that people also believed they might hope to sway outcomes at the heavenly court, where earthly matters were decided, by engaging the assistance of influential spiritual intermediaries in the form of the saints or even Jesus Christ and his mother the Theotokos themselves; they could thus imagine, and act as though, they had some measure of control over the daily workings of their lives, some mechanism for averting their fears and ills. But again, human nature obviously found this insufficient. Whatever apparent measure of control and perception allowed them by orthodox Christianity, all Byzantine people could ultimately do, given the power differential that lay between them and God, was to ask nicely (pray or make supplication) and hope that their collective and individual behavior had been good enough to encourage God's will to coincide with the outcome they desired. When it came down to it, they could never force God into achieving that outcome, nor even manipulate His agents into doing so; and they could never predict with any certainty what would happen.

It is here, then, that the alternative concepts of magic and science (whether occult or otherwise) find their place in the intellectual structures of the Byzantine worldview, here that the practices of sorcery and divination, alongside the techniques of engineering, medicine, agriculture, and the like, find a place in Byzantine life.² Essentially, magic and (occult) science, concepts which, it is important to recall, were largely inherited by the Byzantines from Graeco-Roman and early Judeo-Christian traditions with which they remained familiar, fulfilled a need for a level of control and certainty in everyday life, one that was impossible within the parameters of what may usefully be termed the dominant "standard orthodox tradition."³ For magic and science claimed that, based on alternative conceptions of the workings of the universe, it was possible for people to make things happen around them in a way that was both predictable and certain. On the same basis they claimed to provide people with knowledge

² For a recent broad academic discussion of "the occult," scientific or otherwise, and the impossibility of separating it as a field of study from magic, the supernatural, and science, see Kléber Monod 2013: 1–19; see also Hanegraaff 2012. For a now classic, concise statement of the issues see Kieckhefer 1989: 1–2, 9–17. See nn. 5 and 6 below on the relationship between magic and religion.

³ Greenfield 1988: 3, 153–154; picked up by Kieckhefer 1998: 154; cf. Mavroudi 2006: 64–65.

of what was happening outside their immediate purview, what the outcome of undertakings in the present would be, and what was going to happen in the future.

Although a significant number of Byzantines, in fact probably the great majority, were clearly prepared to engage in modes of thinking that may be deemed magical or scientific and follow these through in practice, it needs to be stressed from the outset here that this does *not* mean that people who engaged in such behavior necessarily or even consciously thought of themselves as anything other than Christian. Rather, it means that Byzantine people in general did not see, or were incapable of seeing, a contradiction between what they thought in this sphere and their concept of Christianity. Intellectually for them these modes of thought were not deemed incompatible, even though, when subject to rigorous logical analysis, they necessarily imply entirely incompatible conceptions of the functioning of the universe; precisely “le consentement pratique et l’ignorance simulée qui fait que nous vivons avec des idées qui, si nous les éprouvions vraiment, devraient bouleverser toute notre vie,” of Albert Camus.⁴ This used to be a difficult issue to digest for modern scholars of the intellectual and religious history of Byzantium (and other historical and contemporary cultures), many of whom were once firmly entrenched in their views of what orthodox Christianity (with or without a capital “o”) meant. It led to much ink being spilt on the supposed distinctions to be drawn between “religion” on the one hand and “magic” on the other; it also led to some extraordinary sleight of hand in explaining the problems supposedly posed by this dichotomy in Christian societies, as well as some imaginative reconstructions of whole swathes of intellectual and social history. “Now,” however, to quote the neat shorthand of Ramsay MacMullen, with “the lessons of anthropology grown familiar, it is common to accept the impossibility of separating magic from religion and to move on to more interesting subjects.”⁵ Any attempt to see magic and occult science as belonging in some separate category of thought from religion in the intellectual history of Byzantium would be a misrepresentation.⁶ No less problematic would be an attempt to separate, in any rigid disciplinary way, magic from science (occult or natural), or indeed from the even more general activity, described in Byzantine times as “philosophy,” which could include both.⁷ Such divisions, while helpful and likely necessary in terms of handling material for the purposes of

⁴ Camus 1942: 33. On issues with seeing Byzantines as monolithically Orthodox, see e.g. Kaldellis 2007: 392–393; 2012: 131–133.

⁵ MacMullen 1997: 143–144. In more depth, see also e.g. Fraser 2009: 132–136; Jolly 2001: 6–12; and the more contentious approach of Stark 2001.

⁶ Magoulias 1967: 228–230; Greenfield 1993: 78–79, and 1995: 118–119; Maguire 1996: 118–120.

⁷ See above, n. 2.

modern scholarship and publication, would be anachronistic if applied to Byzantium. There, for reasons which included both intellectual snobbery and a “delicate dance of appearances” for practical security,⁸ learned scholars certainly did sometimes attempt to distinguish the matter of their own theoretical studies from the practical applications of others;⁹ nevertheless, the conceptual world of the learned “philosopher” studying astronomy or medicine was not isolated from that of the learned astrologer, diviner, or sorcerer, and it may be equally hard to argue that their engagement did not belong to the same broad contexts and patterns of thought as their less sophisticated counterparts.¹⁰

The fundamental assumption, then, on which this chapter rests, is that magic and orthodox Christianity are to be understood as standing at opposite ends of the same continuous spectrum of thought and behavior in the Byzantine world.¹¹ This spectrum, which embraces substantial elements of what modern thought would describe discretely as religion, philosophy, and science, is defined by attitudes deemed appropriate in dealing with the spiritual and natural forces thought to control the everyday world; as such it ranges in approach between the extremes of supplication and coercion. At the former end lay the theology of standard orthodox Christianity, as defined above. At the latter end lay the alternative traditions of magic and (occult) science, modes of thought which held that spiritual and/or natural forces, along with their human and other agents, could be manipulated or coerced by people who knew what they were doing: providing knowledge was sound and technique correct, the desired outcome would necessarily be achieved. This theory was rarely articulated by theorists in texts but was *implicit* in the whole spectrum of coercive magical activity (as described below). On the one hand, people whose views lay at the orthodox, supplicatory end of this spectrum dismissed and condemned the ideas of those at the manipulative end because they challenged the omnipotence and omniscience of God and, more mundanely, appeared to allow people automatically to achieve ends which might potentially be antisocial, selfish, or otherwise unacceptable by

⁸ Kaldellis 2012: 130.

⁹ E.g. Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 28; Kaldellis 2006: 102–103. On Psellos in this context, see also Duffy 1995: 88–89; Ierodiakonou 2006: 108; Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 19, 27–30; Siniossoglou 2011: 77–80.

¹⁰ Magdalino and Mavroudi (2006: 12–35) try to argue for a distinction between magic and occult science on an intellectual level because “the concept of magic does not do justice to the learned, literate end of the spectrum” (12). This is problematic, not least because “the concept of magic” is not clearly defined there, and they still implicitly acknowledge that it is *on* the same spectrum; cf. Mavroudi 2006: 39–43 on “the view that ‘rational’ and ‘pseudo’ science are two facets of the same coin,” and 47; also Mathiesen 1995: 156–159; Duffy 1995: 86–88, 91–94; cf. Kaldellis 2012 on the broadly “conflicted” position of Byzantine “philosophers.”

¹¹ Greenfield 1995: 119; also MacMullen 1997: 83–84, 144; Mavroudi 2006: 64–65.

manipulating natural and potentially evil powers and without demonstrating any morality, virtue, or faith. On the other hand, people whose views lay at the manipulative end felt frustrated, indeed more or less powerless and helpless, when confronted by the attitudes of people at the orthodox, supplicatory end. At the same time, magic and (occult) science need to be plotted on another spectrum that represents the huge range of levels at which they existed: from the ideas and practices of the sophisticated and highly educated, to the crude, simplistic thought and behavior of the formally uneducated. By positing such a spectrum, we may avoid the many difficulties posed by attempts to sharply define and divide Byzantine society into strata or registers along problematic and potentially anachronistic lines familiar from modern scholarship such as elite and popular, high and low, great and little, central and peripheral.¹²

Between the extremes of both spectrums, however, lay a huge gray area in which the majority of Byzantines clearly operated. Here people of all social and educational categories seem to have mixed and matched concepts pluralistically and pretty much at will. People approached elements of orthodox religious cult in ways that were magical, in the sense that their attitude toward them was far more manipulative or coercive than supplicatory, and they regarded outcomes as being automatic rather than the product of God's inscrutable grace. But these same people rarely, if ever, seem to have seen themselves as other than good Christians and thus evidently saw nothing inappropriate or problematic in using Christian powers and elements of ritual for their own very mundane or sometimes actually entirely un-Christian ends.¹³

Likewise the emperor and the imperial regime, as the earthly image of God and His heavenly authorities, could not tolerate in theory any activity that threatened to subvert the singularity of imperial power; they thus followed a long history in legislating against those who engaged in occult science and magic.¹⁴ But in fact emperors and their courtiers quite frequently employed astrologers along with other diviners and magicians, or even engaged in such practices themselves, as they sought an edge over rivals in terms of information, and actual control of events, in times of

¹² Mavroudi 2006: 58; Greenfield 1993: 79–80; and 1995: 121; Russell 1995: 36; Schreiner 2004; Hartnup 2004: 4–12. For the useful concept of “household magic,” see Maguire 1996.

¹³ For an extreme example see *The Magical Treatise of Solomon* in, e.g., MS Harleianus 5596 where magical activities are regularly accompanied by invocations to “the Lord our God” or performed “to the glory of God”; here instructions for making a wax image, which will be most effective (ἐπιτυχέστατον) for anything the sorcerer wants, involve placing it in the sanctuary of a church for several days during which time the priest must celebrate the liturgy: Delatte 1927: 410; Marathakis 2011: 161. For further examples see below. See also Fögen 1995: 105–108; Calofonos 2008; Fraser 2009: 149. For clergy engaging in divination and magic see Mavroudi 2006: 81–83; Greenfield 1995: 151; in early Byzantium, Magoulias 1967: 239; Wortley 2001: 303–305.

¹⁴ Fögen 1995; Stolte 2002.

insecurity and uncertainty.¹⁵ Their legislation, like that of their Roman predecessors, seems to have as much to do with controlling disruptive elements and keeping information out of the hands of opponents as it does with religious or moral scruples, let alone their theoretical implications.¹⁶ At times the accusation of magic, cynical or not, could also be used in the political arena as a weapon against rivals or to vilify those who had fallen from official favor. Either way, possession of occult materials was dangerous. One Isaac Aaron was convicted of sorcery under Manuel I after being found in possession of “a Solomonic book which, when opened and read, summoned legions of demons and caused them to appear.”¹⁷

This same ambiguity is, indeed, present in the very terminology used by the Byzantines, for practitioners of magic did not employ a distinct vocabulary to define their activity and thus clearly did not see it as being different from any other technical practice (such as medicine, agriculture, weaving, etc.) that involved knowledge or skill in manipulating the world around them. The commonest Greek words used to describe what we would call magical activity were *mageia*, *goeteia*, and their cognates; they were generally used interchangeably, although they could be differentiated and hold more specialized meanings. But these words, along with other terms that refer more specifically to different aspects of magical activity (e.g. *manganeia*, *pharmakeia*, or *manteia*), had a pejorative sense.¹⁸ They were used almost exclusively in negative contexts by those who wished to dismiss or condemn magical practice and were, by the same token, avoided by those who actually engaged in it. The latter tended to speak more neutrally in simple terms of carrying out specific activities, such as constructing an amulet or performing a divination, or else they used generic

¹⁵ See Chapter 12.

¹⁶ Magdalino 2006b; Mavroudi 2006: 68–81; also Dickie 1995: 10; Fögen 1995: 103–5, 108–115. Manuel I Komnenos notably wrote a defense of astrology: see Chapter 12.

¹⁷ Choniates, *History* 146; see Greenfield 1993: 74; Magdalino 2006b: 148–149. Examples of the use of such accusations against intellectuals may be found in the portrayal of the Iconoclast patriarch John the Grammarian in *Theophanes Continuatus*, or the astrologers Skleros Seth and Michael Sikidites in the twelfth century in Choniates’ *History*; see Magdalino 2006b. Compare also Psellos’ (likely defensive) accusation that Michael Keroularios had engaged in occult practice: Siniossoglou 2011: 77–78. See also in this context Greenfield 1993 and 1995: 151.

¹⁸ On origins and development see Bremmer 2002; Nimmo Smith 2006. Another specific term, *theourgia* (theurgy = “god-work”), held a more ambivalent sense depending on whether it was to be understood in a “theoretical” or “applied” way. Rooted in later Neoplatonic thought, itself drawing on the *Chaldean Oracles*, the concept enjoyed occasional Byzantine intellectual currency in, notably, the writings of pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite (late fifth to early sixth century) and Psellos (eleventh century); compare Michael Italikos (Siniossoglou 2011: 87), though he does not use the term. It is noteworthy in this context that the fifteenth-century Byzantine Platonist philosopher Plethon, who wrote a commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*, drawing on Psellos, was evidently uninterested in theurgy, though he did not dismiss the possibility of divination. See Shaw 1995; Bergemann 2013; Stock 2013; Duffy 1995: 84–90; Athanassiadi 2002; Burns 2006; Siniossoglou 2011: 192, 212, 319; Hladký 2014: 169.

terms for their activity such as “the practice” (*pragmateia*) or “the art” (*technē*).¹⁹ In the Byzantine intellectual tradition, then, “magic” only really existed as a distinct theoretical category for those who condemned it.

Another conceptual divide not reflected in Byzantine terminology but of interest to modern academic analysis is that between sorcery and witchcraft. The vast majority of surviving evidence suggests that the Byzantines conceived of magic as an art that was learned and transmitted primarily in written form. A striking image is that of Cyprian working as a sorcerer, textbook in hand, that appears on fol. 87 of Parisinus Graecus 543.²⁰ This means that, technically, they were engaged for the most part in sorcery as opposed to witchcraft, something believed to operate through inherent or innate occult or spiritual forces. Although it is true that the latter idea is present in commonly held beliefs about the negative effects of the evil eye and in some specific aspects of demonic possession, there is little else to suggest that the Byzantines thought of practitioners of magic as anything other than specifically educated and learned technical operators.²¹ The loose term “evil eye” refers to an ancient concept that persisted universally throughout the Byzantine period. Here, essentially, envy was held to be so powerful that those possessed by it could harm people and property simply with their gaze. Although the precise mechanism by which such damage was inflicted was the subject of considerable uncertainty and speculation, the more common strands of understanding involved demonic forces, and thus both the “envious eye” and more generalized demonic envy were the object of numerous apotropaic devices and rituals which fell within the realm of sorcery.²²

The limitations and purpose of the present chapter exclude the detailed description of the sources for Byzantine magic and occult science. Sources that represent the point of view of those who saw themselves as practitioners of the arts that orthodoxy condemned as magical or occult are necessarily rare and tend to be clustered either very early or very late in the Byzantine period: most obviously the Egyptian magical papyri and the fifteenth-century handbooks loosely linked under the title *The Magical Treatise of Solomon*.²³ Continuity of tradition, though not always

¹⁹ Greenfield 1995: 120–121.

²⁰ According to his hagiography, Cyprian, a notorious sorcerer from Antioch in Pisidia in the mid-third century, was hired by a client to corrupt the pious Justina through demonic magic; when her faith proved stronger than all his spells, Cyprian abandoned sorcery, was converted to Christianity, and was martyred alongside Justina. For the twelfth-century image, see Probatiki 1980: ill. 4. In general, see Greenfield 1988: 249–251, and 1995: 119. On evidence for amulets being constructed on the basis of handbooks, see Spier 1993: 47–48.

²¹ Note, however, Abrahamse 1982: 15–16.

²² Hinterberger 2013; see 137–140 on the evil eye specifically; for an English summary, see Hinterberger 2010: 130–132. See also Maguire 1994: 219–222, and 1996: 106–115; also Dickie 1995; Russell 1995: 37–41; Vakaloudi 2000: 182–185; Patera 2006: 321–324.

²³ Marathakis 2011; also Greenfield 1988: 159–163, and 1995: 129–130.

continuity of understanding,²⁴ may, however, be demonstrated by the persistent use of works like *The Testament of Solomon*²⁵ and the *Kyranides*,²⁶ and by innumerable but more or less passing references in a range of literature including histories, hagiographies, theological commentaries and treatises, legal documents, and correspondence.²⁷ It is, in fact, such passages that provide the most important evidence for Byzantine attitudes to magic, but the scattered and haphazard nature of this material, coupled with the fact that it is largely from an elite level and condemnatory, means that considerable conjecture is involved in any broadly reconstructive study of attitudes and practice.²⁸ While material evidence of actual practice, derived from art or archaeological artifacts (such as amulets), may provide important and even corrective supplementary material to the written sources, its interpretation is no less problematic.²⁹

The place occupied by magic and the occult sciences in the intellectual tradition is thus complicated and at times elusive.³⁰ But, without implying that the Byzantines themselves saw things in this way, we may suggest three loose categories of activity or intent. Magic and occult science were seen as potential options in (a) providing protection, whether from spiritual, natural, human, or animal agents; (b) controlling or manipulating the world to ensure desired outcomes; and (c) discovering information or predicting the outcomes of events that would help in making decisions about how to act for the best.³¹

Material and literary evidence shows that the Byzantines sought to protect themselves from all manner of ills by means of religious symbols or objects that they carried about with them.³² Among the thousand and one things against which such devices could be used as protection were physical accident, ill health, infertility, lack of social success, negative judgments, and economic or agricultural failure. These amulets or phylacteries might take the form of designs woven into clothing,³³ or objects kept in pockets or commonly worn around the neck, wrist, or other parts of the

²⁴ Mavroudi 2006: 57, following Stewart 1991.

²⁵ McCown 1922; Duling 1983; Iles Johnston 2002. ²⁶ Kaimakis 1980.

²⁷ Compare here the persistence of a Platonist "underground" to which ideas of magic and occult science, at least at the intellectual level, were of interest; Siniossoglou 2011: 49–92.

²⁸ There is no comprehensive study of the sources. In general, see Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 21–27; on the Palaiologan period, Greenfield 1988: 154–164; 1995: 121–131. Reference to the considerable and diverse sources may be found in the individual works cited in the notes.

²⁹ Vikan 1984; Russell 1995; Maguire 1995c; Dauterman Maguire and Maguire 2007.

³⁰ A brief discussion of the confused theoretical framework, and the occasional attempts by believers and sceptics to make sense of their practices, is provided below.

³¹ Greenfield 1995: 131.

³² In early Byzantium, Vikan 1984 and 2010: esp. 59–70; Vakaloudi 2000: 190–207; 2003: 194–200; in the Palaiologan period, Greenfield 1995: 131–136.

³³ Maguire 1995c and 1996: 123–127; also Greenfield 1988: 287, and 1995: 136 for magical symbols on a sorcerer's clothing; Marathakis 2011: 90, 94–95, 163–164.

body. Although some had a superficially decorative purpose, their obvious functionality or symbolism differentiates them from regular jewelry and indicates their deeper significance to the wearer.

Some devices appear clearly orthodox, such as small portable icons of holy figures, including Christ, the Theotokos, and numerous saints, as well as sacred scenes and, of course, ubiquitously and dominantly, crosses.³⁴ These might be enhanced with identifying or explanatory inscriptions linking them to particular figures, a particular wearer, or a particular intention; and they might be more or less sophisticated and costly. In orthodox theology, the employment of such devices was proper as long as the bearer recognized that, like other Christian imagery, they served as aids to veneration and pious contemplation rather than as possessing effective power in their own right. Wearing such symbols was held to encourage people to approach life and its potential misfortunes in the right frame of mind, one that recognized God's benevolent omnipotence and control of all earthly events, and His willingness to listen to the intercession of His holy saints. At the same time evil spiritual powers were known to be afraid of and flee the holy power that such symbols represented. Still potentially orthodox was the addition of tiny relics in cavities within these objects and, perhaps, their actual construction from holy or blessed materials, such as wood or clay from a holy site.³⁵ Here, however, the attitude and perception of the wearer starts to become all important in determining drift from orthodoxy into magical thought, although it is now obviously impossible for the historian to determine what this may actually have been. If such material is still regarded as an encouragement to contemplation, prayer, and intercession, as a symbol of the wearer's piety, there is no problem, but, once the material starts to be perceived as somehow efficacious in itself, because of what it is and where it has come from, the purpose of wearing the object or amulet starts to edge across the spectrum toward a sense of automatic response. The idea that specific ailments, specific troubles, or the spiritual powers that cause them will automatically be driven away by the object, no matter what the lifestyle or frame of mind of the wearer, shades into the magical and coercive rather than supplicatory.³⁶

Other amulets, while still retaining obviously Christian elements, demonstrate this sort of drift more clearly. Take for example a group of amulets which bear a combination of imagery and inscriptions describing the miracle of the woman with the issue of blood.³⁷ At face value such an

³⁴ Magoulias 1967: 239–241, 246–259; Maguire 1996: 135.

³⁵ Magoulias 1967: 255–259; Vikan 1984: 68–69, 81, and 2010: 32–33.

³⁶ Magoulias 1967: 259–266; Vikan 1984. Maguire (1995c: 51, 60–71) stresses the potential problems in ambiguity and multiple repetitions of Christian images.

³⁷ Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48.

amulet could be a perfectly orthodox object worn by a pious woman appropriately seeking divine assistance with her health problems, but if, as is sometimes the case, the material from which the amulet is constructed turns out to be hematite, celebrated in ancient tradition for its value in treating problems of bleeding and blood, there has to be a suggestion that the material from which the amulet is made is being regarded as equally efficacious in producing a predictable and automatic result as the Christian imagery inscribed upon it.³⁸ This same paradigmatic shift can be seen at work in amulets which combine Christian images or symbols with others that are clearly magical in their intent: Christ enthroned in glory but surrounded by magical signs and symbols, for example, or a holy rider trampling a female demon or depicted on the other side of a medallion which shows the so-called “wandering womb,”³⁹ or the evil eye pierced and attacked by sharp objects and harmful animals.⁴⁰ Here the depth of meaning captured by the symbols on the amulet and the extent to which these are drifting across the spectrum are well illustrated by a set of amuletic objects and prayers involving the triumph of the superficially Christian figures of saints Sissinios and Sissinodoros or the Archangel Michael over a female demon known most commonly as Gello, for elaborate folkloric stories establish an explanation and rationale for the defense that this amulet provides against the many potential misfortunes of pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy.⁴¹

Practitioners of magic might also prescribe to their clients, or wear themselves, amuletic devices which were almost or entirely lacking Christian elements. Here magical signs and symbols and powerful “holy” names would accompany all manner of mineral and organic elements along with inscriptions and imagery, the whole being frequently assembled in a small purse or bag to be worn about the person.⁴² And this sort of spiritual protection need not be designed to be portable; most commonly it could be inscribed or secured on doorframes, or secreted in the thatch or elsewhere in a house or property – barn, workshop, shop, etc. It also figured in the complex magic circle constructed by the advanced sorcerer around himself and his assistant in sophisticated techniques involving the

³⁸ On hematite and similar minerals in this context see Vikan 1984: 81, and 2008: 54–56; Tuerk 1999; cf. Maguire 1996: 121.

³⁹ Spier 1993; 2006.

⁴⁰ E.g. Russell 1995: 39–41, 45, 50. On the holy rider in such contexts, see Maguire 1995c: 56–57, 65.

⁴¹ Most recently, see Passalis 2014; see also Greenfield 1989; 1995: 127–128, 133–34. On the group to which these belong, see Vikan 1984: 79–81; Spier 1993: 33–39, 44; Maguire 1996: 120–123, 126–127; Walter 2003: 241–242; and Patera 2006. Popular beliefs surrounding Gello or the *gelloudes* are also the subject of intellectualizing commentary by Michael Psellos, *de Gillo* (= *Philosophica minora*, v. 2, 164); see also Hartnup 2004: 85–92, and, more broadly on Gello, 85–172. On the Russian tradition, see Ryan 2006.

⁴² Greenfield 1988: 279–285; 1995: 133; Maguire 1995c: 62–63; 1996: 136.

consultation or manipulation of demonic powers,⁴³ a device that might also include the use of apotropaic incenses.⁴⁴

If the desire for protection and the methods used to secure it thus occupy an ambiguous space in the intellectual tradition, the same was also true of the ways in which conditions and events in the world were thought to be subject to manipulation by magic and occult science. A key illustration of such ambiguity may be provided by exorcism. Casting out evil spirits thought to be responsible for mental or physical illness followed a strong tradition going back to the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament and beyond.⁴⁵ As such it had been part of the distinctive repertoire of most holy men since early Byzantine times, as well as being embodied in the rituals of the Church, including baptism.⁴⁶ Here again, however, everything depends on the attitude and perception of actors and observers. If the exorcism is thought to be achieved by the will of God working through His chosen agent, then it remains at the orthodox end of the spectrum. If, however, exorcists are thought to have power in their own right; if the ritual actions, the invocations, the materials used are thought to be effective in and of themselves; if too much specificity, too much power of resistance is attributed to the possessing demons; or if they are seen as having been sent directly by a sorcerer, then a drift toward the realm of automatic response and magical coercion is evident.

Byzantine concepts of illness or disability and methods for dealing with them may be equally illustrative of this persistent ambiguity.⁴⁷ Cures recorded in hagiography may suggest that a single event was capable of a range of interpretation; depending on which aspects of the procedure were focused upon and how they were interpreted, a healing might be attributable to miracle, magic, or simple physiotherapy, just as the illness might be thought to result from natural causes, demonic possession, or divine punishment.⁴⁸ Some cures proclaimed as miraculous clearly shade toward the assumption of automatic response: a woman eating plaster scraped from images of saints Kosmas and Damianos, for example, or inhaling smoke from a burnt portion of the robe of Athanasios of Constantinople.⁴⁹

⁴³ Greenfield 1988: 286–287; Marathakis 2011: 95, 98–99, 116–117.

⁴⁴ On such *aromata*, see Greenfield 1995: 135–136; Marathakis 2011: 79, 99, 156–158. Their use by the empress Zoe was documented by Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.64–67, 6.159; see Duffy 1995: 88–90; Schreiner 2004: 688–689. On the use of *aromata* in coercive practices, see Greenfield 1988: 264–265.

⁴⁵ Most obviously the Gerasene demoniac: Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39.

⁴⁶ Joannou 1971: 21–27; Greenfield 1988: 141–148, 215–218; Vakaloudi 2003. ⁴⁷ See Chapter 15.

⁴⁸ For a clear example, see *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 81; cf. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 8.13. For exorcism combined with other curative means, see Vakaloudi 2003: 182–189.

⁴⁹ *Miracles of Kosmas and Damianos* 137, tr. Mango 1972: 139; see Magoulias 1967: 263; Maguire 1995c: 66; also *Posthumous Miracles of Athanasios of Constantinople* 63. Cf. Zoe Karbonopsina's cure for infertility and fever: *Anonymous Miracles of the Pege* 26; Maguire 1995c: 70; in general, Vikan 1984.

In a cure attributed to saints Cyrus and John, bound figurines enchanted by a sorcerer using demonic magic are regarded as the cause of crippling disability: a story which, when unpacked, illustrates clearly the way in which magical activity was thought to be able to manipulate the physical world to produce disability.⁵⁰ The Byzantines thus certainly believed that magical manipulation could produce a wide range of harmful conditions in people and animals, but it is also true that they might suspect “straight” medical practitioners of poisoning. At the same time, they were ambiguous about the outcomes of magic in this context, for it was not always thought to do harm; much depended on where one stood and magic was thus thought to be the *cure* for innumerable medical conditions as well as their cause.⁵¹ Persistent infertility in people or their livestock might be blamed on magical or pharmacological manipulation, whether by “binding” or the administration of natural or magical contraceptives or abortifacients by enemies. But the slowness or failure of saintly intermediaries to produce the desired results might easily induce recourse to methods claiming to be more “reliable” and predictable, and people might thus turn to a sorcerer to create or enhance the fertility they so desperately desired. In the right circumstances, abortion or the prevention of conception could obviously be seen as a definite positive. As with exorcism, then, it would be dangerous to draw distinctions between miracle, magic, and “natural” medicine without being able to assess the attitude and perception of participants or witnesses, especially as sometimes Byzantines clearly had trouble distinguishing saints from sorcerers.⁵²

One final key illustration of magical manipulation is provided by notions concerning the inducement of love or lust. This was evidently a prime area in which magic was thought to operate since it tended to fall outside the area deemed appropriate for more orthodox intervention and was obviously an awkward social issue. But whether this was perceived innocently as a means of getting a person to fall in love or as violent sexual coercion amounting to rape clearly depended on the point of view and, to some extent, perceived outcome.⁵³ The same issues also apply to many other areas in which magic was thought to be effective: the creation or destruction of wealth and commercial or agricultural prosperity; the inducement or ruination of that all-important Byzantine commodity, influence

⁵⁰ Sophronios of Jerusalem, *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, PG 35:3541–3548; cf. Magoulias 1967: 236–238; for twelfth-century examples, see Greenfield 1993: 73, 77; for late Byzantine use of figurines, Greenfield 1988: 265–268.

⁵¹ Magoulias 1967: 238–239; Vikan 1984; Greenfield 1988: 237–240; 1995: 137; Duffy 1995: 88, 92–93; Vakaloudi 2003.

⁵² E.g. Kazhdan 1995; Joannou 1971: 27–28; Abrahamse 1982: 9–12; Kaldellis 2014a: 466–469.

⁵³ Greenfield 1988: 244–245; 1995: 139–140. On rings intended to ensure a happy marriage, Walker 2002; cf. Vikan 1984: 83.

and favor; the avoidance of negative legal and administrative decisions or the encouragement of positive ones; and so on.⁵⁴ In all these areas people might see themselves as the victims of magic and thus regard it negatively, but they were evidently also prepared to see themselves as potential beneficiaries from the edge that magical manipulation might give them, and thus see it as something useful and positive.

In our world, saturated as it is with information, it has become something of a commonplace that knowledge equates with power. The Byzantines, however, lived in a world in which knowledge, even in the sense of traditional wisdom, was limited in quantity and scope and in which reliable information, whether about what was going on in the present or of a kind that might allow people to anticipate what would happen in the future, was extremely hard to come by. In this situation any information could again be important in providing people with an edge over social, economic, or political competitors, or simply in surviving. Thus recourse to practices which might potentially provide such knowledge and information was evidently popular. These techniques embraced another vast range of possibilities and spread across the spectrums from supplication to coercion and automatic response, from simplistic to vastly complex. The orthodox tradition held that God might reveal certain aspects of the future or otherwise hidden knowledge to those upon whom his grace lay, and people might thus be encouraged to seek advice or predictions from holy men and their kind – miracles of prophecy are thus a commonplace in hagiography. But many were clearly prepared to utilize methods that they regarded as being more direct, detailed, and possibly trustworthy, even though they relied more or less heavily on “scientific” or magical thinking.⁵⁵ In the former category one may think of weather forecasting from natural signs or the procedures of medical diagnosis which relied on such techniques as examining bodily symptoms or fluids for indications of health problems. However, the by-now familiar propensity of regular Byzantines to drift across the spectrum from orthodoxy to magical thought may be illustrated by practices involving the random opening or choosing of passages from the Bible, spinning the Gospel on the end of a stick, interpreting the choking of a communicant during the liturgy as a sign of guilt, or “reading” the movements or changes in appearance of icons.⁵⁶ Such cases are indicative not only of the fuzziness

⁵⁴ Greenfield 1988: 240–248. For a summary of negative outcomes, Greenfield 1995: 138. In general on early ambiguity, see Nimmo Smith 2006: 226.

⁵⁵ In the fifteenth century, Plethon, from his Platonist perspective, is prepared to accept divination based on the workings of fate, rather than God: Siniossoglou 2011: 319–320.

⁵⁶ For Balsamon’s condemnation of such practices, see Fögen 1995: 102. On icons in this context see, most famously, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.65–67 on the empress Zoe; Duffy 1995: 88–90; Schreiner 2004: 69; Ierodiakonou 2006: 108–110; and Psellos’ intellectualizing discussion of the icon

in differentiation between orthodox and unorthodox approaches to the acquisition of information, but also of the simplistic level at which many people evidently participated in divinatory practices. Interpreting natural occurrences ranging from bodily aches, pains, twitches, and itches, to the flight of birds, the behavior of animals, the shape of clouds, the timing and location of thunder or lightning, the patterns of scattered barley and so forth were widespread, though how seriously they were taken is hard to say.⁵⁷ Given the Byzantine propensity for understanding earthquakes and other natural disasters as clear signs of God's attitude, it seems plausible to suggest that the interpretation of more minor phenomena could also be accepted, or at least tolerated, by orthodoxy if they were regarded as reading God's book of nature, as it were, one in which signs and indications were set out by the omniscient creator and manager of earthly affairs. But generally they were frowned on as foolish superstition and seem to have been regarded and condemned as magical only if their participants were thought to assume that these signs were somehow not God's work but due to the manipulation either of a natural world independent of His control or of (evil) spiritual agents.

Other mechanisms for gaining information were more sophisticated, although the degree to which they were perceived as magical continues to be ambiguous. Somewhere in the middle range, for instance, was the interpretation of dreams, a practice that could be professionalized and was the subject of a number of surviving treatises.⁵⁸ Studying the markings of livers, entrails, and shoulder blades of animals, arithromancy, cleromancy, or geomancy are other examples of relatively developed techniques which could require a certain level of appropriate learning and the involvement of at least semi-professional practitioners.⁵⁹ At the top end of the scale of complexity was unquestionably the occult science of astrology (see

of the Theotokos at Blachernai: *Orationes hagiographicae* 4, esp. 205.136–206.146; on which see most recently Barber 2012. Cf. Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian* 143.

⁵⁷ For detailed instructions for interpreting the twitching or throbbing of body parts or the placement of moles, see Diels 1907; Delatte 1927: 209–210, 627–630. For augury and various forms of weather or seasonal prediction involving animals, etc., see Psellos, *Περὶ ὠμοπλατοσκοπίας καὶ οἰωνοσκοπίας* (= *Philosophica minora*, v. 2, 114–115). For practices mentioned by Theodore Balsamon in the twelfth century, see Fögen 1995: 99–102; by Joseph Bryennios in the fifteenth, Greenfield 1995: 143–144.

⁵⁸ Oberhelman 1991; Mavroudi 2002; Delatte 1927: 511–547, cf. 468, 507 for techniques to provoke divinatory dreams; see also Mavroudi 2014a; Oberhelman 2014; and, more generally, Angelidi and Calofonos 2014. Important for the intellectual consideration of dreams in the fourteenth century is Nikephoros Gregoras' *Explicatio in librum Synesii de insomniis*, on which see Bydén 2014.

⁵⁹ For an eleventh-century reading of the ancient art of omoplatoscopy see Psellos, *Περὶ ὠμοπλατοσκοπίας καὶ οἰωνοσκοπίας* (= *Philosophica minora*, v. 2, 113–114); for a thirteenth-century example, Delatte 1927: 206–209. For examples of arithromancy, cleromancy, and geomancy see Delatte 1927: 388–396, 451–455, 557–561. Compare here too the interpretation of, and broader talismanic attitude toward, statues and other elements of surviving antique architecture, particularly in Constantinople; most recently Jouette 2014; Magdalino 2006b: 129, 134–135, 151–152.

Chapter 12).⁶⁰ Beyond that, professional practitioners of magic were thought capable of determining aspects of the future or other hidden knowledge for their clients by various more or less complex forms of scrying, that is, by observing, either directly or through induced trance states, hallucinations, and mediums, images in the light reflected from shining surfaces – mirrors, bowls of water, oiled objects, and lamps.⁶¹

So far this survey has considered attitudes to magic and occult science, reasons why people resorted to them, and some of the range of techniques and practices they used. Another important aspect that remains to be considered in placing them in their intellectual context is that of their empowerment. The question of how people thought all this worked is important because it is largely what determined where their ideas and behaviors fell on the spectrum described above. For its opponents, the orthodox doctrinalists, the operation of magic was an illusion, permitted by God to test faith and carried out in its details by the demons; even when magic appeared to have been effective or to have provided accurate information there was no validity to the technique. Everyday recourse to magical and divinatory modes of thought seems so widespread, however, that most people who used them, while clearly aware of such negative and dismissive attitudes, cannot have seen them in this way. They cannot have thought of themselves as being deluded by demons or as engaging in anything that was particularly improper that might jeopardize their status as good Christians. In fact, it seems likely that most people actually gave little thought to how magic worked, or at least were no clearer than most people are today about what is actually involved in turning on a light or looking up information on an internet search engine. For their part, learned practitioners of intellectualized forms of magic and divination must have been at least partially aware of the depth of tradition and the complexity of the worldview that underpinned their operations. Some clearly did believe that they were consulting occult, evil powers to gain this knowledge and took elaborate measures both to protect themselves and to ensure the veracity of the information they gained from their inherently untrustworthy informants,⁶² but this does not mean that even they knew and accepted *all* the premises on which it rested or

⁶⁰ See in particular, in the context of this chapter, Magdalino 2006a; 2006b; Mavroudi 2006: 67–68.

⁶¹ Numerous examples form the core of the various versions of *The Magical Treatise of Solomon*; see Marathakis 2011: 90–113 and, for one example in English translation, 115–133. On dish-divining at a high level, see e.g. Magdalino 2006b: 123–124, 150–151. On techniques and powers, see Delatte 1932; Hopfner 1932; Greenfield 1988: 242–243, 294–296, 298–302; 1995: 145–147.

⁶² See for example the explicit warning in *The Magical Treatise of Solomon* that the spirits to be used in the sorcery are evil demons who “are the causes of everything that is bad, of every misfortune and temptation”: Delatte 1927: 412. Hence also the persistent stress on purity in lifestyle of the sorcerer, the elaborate prescriptions regarding protective clothing and the magic circle, the use of a virgin medium, etc.: Marathakis 2011: 90–91, 162–164.

had thought through the rationale. Late magical manuscripts indicate, for instance, that elements of necromancy and hydromancy, which once underpinned some techniques, had been largely if not completely forgotten.⁶³ Nor does it mean that even these practitioners necessarily saw what they were doing as essentially unchristian. Evidence of practice of, and belief in, “black” magic, in the sense of behavior deliberately antithetical to Christian teaching or selling one’s soul to the Devil, does exist,⁶⁴ but it is scarce, and those engaged in high-level demonic magic saw themselves as working in a tradition derived from the Old Testament king Solomon,⁶⁵ using techniques which certainly had some biblical antecedents,⁶⁶ and protected themselves by using purifications typical of orthodox ascetic techniques and materials sanctified in Christian rituals.⁶⁷

We turn now to the theoretical or metaphysical underpinnings of magic and occult science, which lay primarily in the religious, philosophical, and scientific traditions of the classical and Near Eastern cultures. These had been inherited by Byzantium through the old Roman empire, although elements from other cultures had also crept in over time, for example earlier on from Slavic and Arabic, later from Turkish and western European, traditions.⁶⁸ Here notions drawn primarily from Stoic and Neoplatonic thought, that microcosm and macrocosm were closely interconnected, whether directly or by analogy and similarity, created a widely accepted understanding that activity at higher levels produced effects at lower levels and that activity at lower levels, in the material and human realm, could produce effects in and even manipulate higher levels.⁶⁹ Based

⁶³ Thus, for example, a “love” spell involving a figurine in ms. Par. Gr. 2419 (one of the key manuscripts for *The Magical Treatise of Solomon*), fol. 146v, Delatte 1927: 459, contains no overt allusion at all to the *nekydaimon* (or spirit of the dead) which is the vehicle of the sorcerer’s commands in closely parallel lead or papyrus texts from third- or fourth-century Egypt; Martinez 1991; Greenfield 1988: 266–267. On the loss of hydromancy from complex divinatory techniques see Greenfield 1988: 159–163; 1995: 130, 146–148; Marathakis (2011: 34–35) puts forward an alternative suggestion.

⁶⁴ For example, sorcery cases from the patriarchal court in the fourteenth century mention desecrating Christ’s name by obliterating and trampling on the ink while exhibiting the signs and invocations of demons or writing the Lord’s prayer backwards and upside down in an amulet; Greenfield 1988: 255. Other ritual elements involved murder or human blood; Greenfield 1988: 255–257; 1995: 140–141. For the idea of a pact with the Devil see most vividly, if fictively, that of Heliodorus in the *Life of Leo of Catania* 9–34, and Alexakis’ commentary, 97–99; cf. Kazhdan 1995: 77. Other examples in Greenfield 1988: 255.

⁶⁵ Hence the titles of key texts such as *The Testament of Solomon* and *The Magical Treatise of Solomon*; see Torijano 2002.

⁶⁶ For example the story of the witch of Endor, I Samuel 28:3–25; or the burnt liver and heart of a fish that drives away demons in Tobit 6–8; as well as some elements in New Testament exorcisms.

⁶⁷ Greenfield 1988: 287–291; 1995: 149–150; Marathakis 2011: 162–163; also Wortley 2001: 305.

⁶⁸ On intercultural exchange, see Greenfield 1988: 162; Mathiesen 1995; Mavroudi 2006: 59–63, 89–92.

⁶⁹ On the divided and evolving Neoplatonic tradition here, for example the position of Porphyry compared to Iamblichos on the role and functioning of theurgy, see above n. 18; see, further, Fraser 2009: 137–149.

on concepts of cosmic harmony and tension, an elaborate system of sympathy and antipathy was thought to stretch from earthly minerals, flora, and fauna right up to the celestial bodies and even to the spiritual powers of the universe;⁷⁰ also involved were notions of natural balance between motions and elements. It was thus thought that people who knew what they were doing could both gain hidden knowledge and information by interpreting indications at lower levels stemming from the greater sphere of knowledge and vision at higher levels (by analogy with ripples in water or reflection of light), and also manipulate outcomes at the lower level by inducing or coercing elements at higher levels (by analogy with magnetism and tidal flux).

At the same time, Judeo-Christian ideas about the lesser spiritual beings of the universe, angels and demons, were worked into the framework of preexisting polytheistic deities and powers, as in Neoplatonic cosmological theory, and elaborated or confused.⁷¹ The cosmic system was thus seen to be “powered” by a range of spiritual forces which produced, or at least explained, the sympathetic connections that were discerned and employed. While Christian orthodoxy demanded that these spiritual powers, if they were not dismissed outright, necessarily operated under the direction of God, magic and occult science held implicitly that they could and did operate independently.⁷² Vast and convoluted schemas were envisaged of individual powers operating at different levels of magnitude that were responsible for very specific things and were located precisely in terms of place or even time.⁷³ They were all (at least potentially) named and ranked, and a sprawling assortment of talismanic images and signs was thought to actually embody, not just metaphorically represent, the natural and supernatural powers and forces of the universe.⁷⁴ Here, then, was the empowerment of magic: by knowing and understanding the power structures of the spiritual and natural world as well as the specific areas of control and ability of individuals within it, the relationship of minerals, plants, and animals to each other and the spiritual powers, the appropriate depictions and inscriptions which indicated these elements and their relationships, and the influence that place or time (in terms of days of the week or month, phases of the moon, or astral correlation) might have on such relationships, it was held

⁷⁰ See Ierodiakonou 2006 on the origins of these concepts in general and their particular use by Psellos; also Greenfield 1988: 175–177; Papathanassiou 2006: 175–182.

⁷¹ Greenfield 1988: 179–218; Duffy 1995: 84–85; Vakaloudi 2000: 185–188; Livanos 2010: 108.

⁷² Greenfield 1988: 165–175.

⁷³ Greenfield 1988: 202–211, 219–248; Marathakis 2011: 36–74, 99–106, 184–199; Jordan 2007: 60–62.

⁷⁴ Vikan 1984: 74; Greenfield 1988: 193–195, 277–279, 335–351, and 1989: 123–138; Dauterman Maguire and Maguire 2007: 58–96.

that practitioners of magic could engineer all the things described above.⁷⁵

Given these theoretical underpinnings, Byzantine magic at some levels may be legitimately conceived of as an “alternative” science, but it is important to realize that such a conception would be as much an illusion as accepting that the position of the orthodox doctrinalists was widely followed: both represent extremes which were rarely encountered in a pure form. Instead, as has been made clear, most people operated in a rather dim and fuzzy no-man’s-land in between. Records of the practice of magic, even the texts of magical handbooks themselves, indicate that people plugged into only those parts of “the system” that were relevant and appeared effective to them in their particular circumstances. Many, perhaps most, probably did so orally and certainly pluralistically without concerning themselves with the logical, intellectual patterns and ramifications of the whole, which in this sense then may be said to exist only in the minds of modern analysts.⁷⁶

A final consideration concerns the way these ideas may have changed over time. In fact, the evidence for magic and the occult sciences is so widely scattered and so thin that it is hard to discern clear trends over the Byzantine millennium. Just as orthodox Christianity was continuously being constructed in relation to evolutions in thought, as well as social and political change, so too the status of and concepts within magical thought must have evolved in the hands of its practitioners and the constructs of its opponents. Scholars have suggested that one example of change involves the sharpening of attitudes and definition produced by the Iconoclastic disputes and their resolution in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁷⁷ Another possibility is that influence from the west may be detected in later Byzantine attitudes to magic, for example the appearance of stereotypical notions of witchcraft in the Greek verse romances,⁷⁸ or sorcery purges conducted by the patriarchate in the fourteenth century.⁷⁹ A third involves an increase in intellectual attention to some aspects of magic and occult science, or at least the principles underpinning them, detectable in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and again in the Palaiologan period as part of a more general interest in “Hellenism” or “paganism.”⁸⁰ In a situation where traditional notions of orthodoxy appeared increasingly inadequate to deal with the harsh realities of

⁷⁵ Greenfield 1988: 251–302.

⁷⁶ Greenfield 1995: 148–152; Mavroudi 2006: 83–86; Duffy 1995: 90; Mathiesen 1995: 163.

⁷⁷ Maguire 1995b: 4–6; 1995c; 1996; Dauterman Maguire and Maguire 2007: 95–96.

⁷⁸ Greenfield: 1988: 250–251.

⁷⁹ For the trials, see Cupane 1980. For comparison between the fourth- and the fourteenth-century purges, see Fögen 1995: 111–115.

⁸⁰ In general, see Kaldellis 2007; Siniossoglou 2011.

existence, it might make sense to suggest a parallel increase in the exploration of magic and occult science. The evidence, however, is insufficient to confirm that such a turn was widely shared or that attitudes were any less ambiguous than in the past, and it may also be read as a distortion produced by exceptional individuals at the elite level.⁸¹

⁸¹ Most obviously here perhaps Michael Psellos, Manuel I Komnenos, Nikephoros Gregoras, and George Gemistos Plethon. See previous note and Duffy 1995; George 2001–2002; Athanassiadi 2002; Tihon 2006; Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 15–21; Magdalino 2006a: 91–96, 114–126; Ierodiakonou 2006.

CHAPTER 14

ALCHEMY

GERASIMOS MERIANOS

INTRODUCTION

The origins of alchemy appear to lie in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Its accumulated craftsmanship – such as mastering the production of certain alloys, experimenting in the making of new ones, possessing dyeing techniques that could simulate silver and gold, and imitating various precious objects – gradually blended in the melting pot of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt with Greek philosophical doctrines, as well as with Gnostic and Hermetic elements. Notions such as the unity of matter in a single ultimate substance, sympathy and antipathy that cause every cosmic combination and division, and the *mimesis* of Nature as the main objective of the arts, played a decisive role in the emergence of alchemy as a distinct field.¹ The junction between its “philosophical” and “technical” directions probably took place during the third century CE.² Nonetheless, these two currents that gave birth to alchemy could sometimes reflect two tendencies that varied in their goals. Simplistically speaking, these were to comprehend nature and perfect it or to imitate nature without perfecting it.³ This chapter surveys certain aspects of the perception and development of alchemy in Byzantium. It includes an outline of the textual tradition and its main authors; an account of notions, definitions, and information concerning the public perception of alchemy drawn from non-alchemical literature; a presentation of key concepts used in Byzantine alchemical authors, especially after the seventh century; and, lastly, a glance at the relation between alchemy, industry, and the state.

Thanks are due to Matteo Martelli for his useful comments at a final stage of this study. I wish also to thank Ilias Anagnostakis, Eudoxia Delli, Marina Koumanoudi, Nikolaos Livanos, and Yannis Stoyas for fruitful discussions.

¹ Mertens 2006: 206; also Festugière 1944: 217–240; Halleux 1979: 62–64; Newman 2004: 24–33; Principe 2013: 9–22.

² Principe 2013: 13–14.

³ Newman (2004: 17–20) stresses the difference between a perfective and an imitative art.

TEXTUAL TRADITION AND AUTHORS

The primary phase of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy is technical, represented by two papyri composed in Greek around 300 CE containing recipe collections for imitating gold, silver, gems, and purple dye. They are known as the Leiden (P. Leid. x) and Stockholm (P. Holm.) papyri.⁴ However, their techniques are ancient and probably predate them.⁵

The development of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy and the contribution of Byzantine authors to the discipline can be traced in the so-called “Greek alchemical corpus,” a collection of texts in Greek witnessed primarily in these three codices: Marc. Gr. 299, copied in the late tenth or early eleventh century; Par. Gr. 2325, thirteenth century; and Par. Gr. 2327, copied in 1478.⁶ The existence of partial collections in antiquity is not improbable, but cannot be confirmed.⁷ The corpus contains texts dated from the first to the fifteenth century, which form three chronological layers.⁸ The first layer comprises the work of pseudo-Demokritos, the oldest extant Greek alchemical treatise (first century), of which epitomies have survived.⁹ It also contains treatises attributed to legendary or pseudonymous authors – for example, Hermes, Agathodaimon, Isis, Cleopatra, Ostanes, Mary the Jewess – probably written between the first and third centuries.¹⁰

The second layer of the corpus consists of the works of Zosimos of Panopolis (fl. c. 300), the most significant Graeco-Egyptian alchemical author.¹¹ His Gnostic and Hermetic influences imbue his technical operations, while Zosimos emphasizes the need for laboratory work as a method of purifying the intellect, and employs symbolic analogies between alchemical operations and spiritual salvation.¹² Relevant to his laboratory preoccupation is his criticism of a methodology which seemingly relied only on astrologic and daimonic principles and also mocked laboratory work and self-purification. This confirms that diverse schools of alchemy existed with different objectives and methodologies.¹³

⁴ Halleux 1981. See also Trismegistos nos. 61300 and 64429, respectively, in www.trismegistos.org.

⁵ Newman 2004: 27.

⁶ A fourth codex, Laur. Plut. 86.16, is dated to 1492. It is still unclear whether it is a copy of Par. Gr. 2327; on the corpus, see Hunger 1978: v. 2, 279–282; Halleux 1979: 60–62; Mertens 1995: xx–xliii; 2006: 207–209, 220–224; Martelli 2011a: 3–46; on Marc. Gr. 299, see Saffrey 1995.

⁷ Mertens 2006: 220–221.

⁸ For the edition of the works of authors mentioned from now on in the text, see Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2 (unless otherwise cited).

⁹ They bear the titles *On the Making of Purple and Gold: Natural and Secret Questions* (henceforth *Natural and Secret Questions*) and *On the Making of Silver*.

¹⁰ On pseudepigraphy in alchemical literature, see Halleux 1979: 97–100.

¹¹ Zosimos of Panopolis’ *Authentic Memoirs* has been re-edited by Mertens; for the rest of his work, see Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2. On his life and work, see Fowden 1986: 120–126; Mertens 1995: introduction; 2006; 2008; Letrouit 1995: 22–46; Fraser 2007.

¹² Mertens 2008: 407. ¹³ Fraser 2004: 137–145; cf. Principe 2013: 20–21.

The third layer of the corpus comprises texts by subsequent commentators and authors such as Synesios (first half of the fourth century),¹⁴ Olympiodoros (sixth century), Stephanos of Alexandria (seventh century),¹⁵ the four alchemical poets Heliodoros, Theophrastos, Hierotheos, and Archelaos (seventh century),¹⁶ Christianos (seventh or eighth century), the Anonymous Philosopher (eighth–ninth centuries),¹⁷ Michael Psellos (1018–late 1070s),¹⁸ Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–c. 1269), and Kosmas the Hieromonk (fifteenth century?).¹⁹ Of Byzantine interest are also several other works, such as treatises attributed to Justinian the Great and Herakleios,²⁰ and technical recipes.²¹ To these we should add an *Alphabetical Lexicon of the Chrysopœia*, which implies that the assimilation of different substances or the use of the *Decknamen* (“cover names”) in the corpus was so frequent in Byzantium that it required a separate lexicon.²² Up until now the sole general edition containing the majority of the corpus remains that of Berthelot and Ruelle (1887–1888), while the known Greek manuscripts are listed in Bidez et al. (1924–1932).

Certain texts and codices manifest a crucial interaction between the Byzantine, Arabic, and Latin alchemical traditions. For instance, the anonymous so-called *Work of the Four Elements* (c. twelfth century) is influenced by a text attributed to the semi-legendary Muslim alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān.²³ The *Anonymous of Zuretti*, a work written in Greek in southern Italy (c. 1300), draws mainly from Latin texts, including translations from Arabic, and to a much lesser degree from Greek ones.²⁴ Finally, two fifteenth-century manuscripts, Par. Gr. 2419 and Holkh. Gr. 109, also contain alchemical recipes; the sources for the recipes of the former are mostly Latin, while of the latter they are Latin (in great part) as well as Greek, and its language reveals some contemporary Turkish influences.²⁵

The Greek alchemical corpus must have been assembled between the seventh and the eleventh century, after Stephanos of Alexandria (as

¹⁴ Synesios, *To Dioskoros: Notes on Demokritos' Book*; dating: Martelli 2013: 52. For the dating of Olympiodoros, Stephanos, the four alchemical poets, and Christianos, see Mertens 2006: 208–209; for the Anonymous Philosopher, see Letrouit 1995: 63–64; for Kosmas, see Colinet 2010: cxxxvii–cxxxviii.

¹⁵ Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold*; partially re-edited and translated by Taylor 1937 (Lectures I and II) and 1938 (Letter to Theodore and Lecture III).

¹⁶ Goldschmidt 1923; cf. Letrouit 1995: 82–83.

¹⁷ According to Letrouit 1995: 63–65, this name applies to two different authors, Anonymous Philosopher I and II, who both date to the eighth–ninth centuries.

¹⁸ Psellos, *How to Make Gold*. For an Italian translation, see Albini 1988.

¹⁹ Kosmas the Hieromonk, *Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making*.

²⁰ Saffrey 1995: 4–5; Letrouit 1995: 57–58; Mertens 1995: xxiv, xxxvi, 124–125.

²¹ Mertens 2006: 222.

²² Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 4–17; Martelli and Valente 2013. On the definition of *Decknamen*, see Principe 2013: 18.

²³ Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 337–342; Colinet 2000b. Cf. Mavroudi 2002: 403 n. 39.

²⁴ Colinet 2000a: introduction; 2005: 135–140. ²⁵ Colinet 2010: XI–CIX.

citations from his work had been interpolated in the texts of the oldest alchemists)²⁶ and before Marc. Gr. 299 (which incorporates the majority of texts).²⁷ The reasons for the expression of such an interest in alchemy in the seventh century are obscure, but it seems notable during Herakleios' reign (610–641). Perhaps alchemy appeared as a way to replenish the depleted treasury, while the gradual replacement of Alexandria by Constantinople as the Byzantine melting pot of local, Alexandrian, Syriac, Persian, and Arabic “occult” traditions also exercised some influence.²⁸

This seventh-century current is affirmed by: (i) the fact that Stephanos dedicated the last “Lecture” of his work *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* to Herakleios;²⁹ (ii) the reference in Marc. Gr. 299, fol. 2r (table of contents) to three, now lost, alchemical texts attributed to Herakleios;³⁰ and (iii) the composition of the four alchemical poems. It is therefore plausible that at least one collection was assembled then, and became an indirect source for the principal witnesses of the corpus' manuscript tradition. This collection possibly comprised the aforementioned works of Stephanos, Herakleios, and the four alchemical poets.³¹ Given that Marc. Gr. 299, the oldest extant manuscript, was copied in the tenth–eleventh centuries, Mertens has reasonably suggested that the construction of the alchemical corpus must have been related to the wider project of forming textual collections of the ninth–tenth centuries, such as the *Geoponika*, the *Hippiatrika*, *Palatine Anthology*, Hermetic corpus, etc. Marc. Gr. 299 is possibly the initial product of a relevant attempt, while subsequent codices incorporated later texts – e.g. Psellos' *How to Make Gold* in Par. Gr. 2327 – or originally independent collections.³²

CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS, AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Alchemy aims to interpret and comprehend the constitution and function of the cosmos and, consequently, to acquire the knowledge that would lead imperfect matter to perfection through the application of fundamental natural principles. It is therefore conceived in a philosophical framework, in which alchemists act as interpreters of nature. Alchemical authors and commentators relied heavily on ancient authorities. It is indicative, for instance, that the Anonymous Philosopher delineates a genealogy of the most eminent

²⁶ E.g. Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 173,1–2. Cf. Mertens 2006: 220 and n. 41.

²⁷ Mertens 2006: 220. ²⁸ Magdalino 2006a: 48–51.

²⁹ Stephanos, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 243,1–3. On Stephanos' alchemical work, see Papathanassiou 1990; 1991; 1996; 2005; 2006. For his identity, see Papathanassiou 2006 (relying on Wolska-Conus 1989) and Roueché 2012.

³⁰ Saffrey 1995: 4–5; Letrouit 1995: 58. ³¹ I owe this suggestion to Matteo Martelli.

³² This paragraph relies on Mertens 2006: 221–223. On Byzantine collections, Lemerle 1971 remains valuable, although it characterizes this trend as “encyclopedism,” challenged by Odorico 1990; see now Van Deun and Macé 2011.

alchemical authorities (Hermes Trismegistos, John the Archpriest, pseudo-Demokritos, Zosimos, Olympiodoros, and Stephanos).³³ At the same time, there was a tendency to reinterpret the ancient alchemical literature.

The seminal alchemical expression “one is all, and through it is all” (found in variants)³⁴ points to the universal substratum; if all things are the same in the core of matter, then transmutation of one into another is possible.³⁵ Moreover, the equally influential expression of pseudo-Demokritos, “nature delights in nature, nature conquers nature, nature masters nature,” encapsulates the doctrine of sympathies and antipathies, to which all combinations and separations of physical bodies are owed.³⁶ The theoretical structure of later authors is based largely on these doctrines; for example, Stephanos of Alexandria comments on both,³⁷ the Anonymous Philosopher cites a variant of the latter,³⁸ and the text under the name of Kosmas the Hieromonk cites a variant of the former.³⁹

Alchemy is usually defined as “sacred” and/or “divine art” by alchemical authors.⁴⁰ It is otherwise named *chem(e)ialchym(e)ia* in both alchemical and non-alchemical literature.⁴¹ The best-known non-specialized definition is in the late tenth-century *Souda*, which describes *chemeia* as “the making (*kataskeue*) of silver and gold,” implying the perception of alchemy as a technical art. The same entry continues by mentioning that Diocletian (284–305) in Egypt ordered the books written by the ancients concerning *chemeia* to be burned so that the Egyptians would not accumulate wealth or become emboldened against the Romans in the future.⁴²

³³ Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 424,6–425,9. According to Letrouit 1995: 64, 93, this author was the Anonymous Philosopher II.

³⁴ E.g. Olympiodoros (Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 84,13–14): “Ἐν τὸ πᾶν, δι’ οὗ τὸ πᾶν. τοῦτο γὰρ εἰ μὴ ἔχει τὸ πᾶν, οὐδὲν τὸ πᾶν. Cf. Zosimos, *Authentic Memoirs*, 6, p. 22 (and v. 2, pp. 180–183 n. 1 for more variations); Plass 1982; Martelli 2013: 54.

³⁵ Principe 2013: 26. Transmutation is difficult to explain within an Aristotelian framework: Viano 1996. On transmutation theory, see also Dufault 2015.

³⁶ Pseudo-Demokritos, *Natural and Secret Questions*, § 3.61–63 (p. 84): ἡ φύσις τῆ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ. See p. 85, app. phil., on alchemical texts quoting the expression. For its meaning, see Mertens 1995: 168 n. 2; Martelli 2013: 33–34, 70–71. On the “natural sympathy theory,” see Dufault 2015: 218–219.

³⁷ Stephanos, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 214,17–215,11.

³⁸ Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 427,6–8.

³⁹ Kosmas, *Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making*, § 1, p. 66,5–7; see Colinet 2010: 116–117 n. 3.

⁴⁰ “Divine art” in Zosimos (e.g. *Final Quittance* 363,9), “sacred and divine art of the philosophers” in Stephanos (*On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 220,17–18, 223,3), as well as “sacred art” in the same author (*ibid.* 221,26–27). On the development of the notion of a “sacred and divine art” linked to the Egyptian religious milieu, see Martelli 2013: 65–66.

⁴¹ For instance, see *chemeia* in Stephanos (*On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 208,28, 209,5), *chymeia* in Olympiodoros (Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 94,17), and *chymia* in Kosmas (*Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making*, § 1, p. 66,4). For *cheimeia*, see n. 71.

⁴² *Souda*, s.v. Χημεία (X 280); cf. s.v. Διοκλητιανός (Δ 1156). See also John of Antioch, ed. Roberto, fr. 248 = ed. Mariev, fr. 191; Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis*: John of Antioch, fr. 52 [165] (p. 196,3–10); *AASS Julii*, v. 2, 557c. Thorndike (1929: 194–195) regards the story of the burning of the books as fictitious.

The variations in the spelling of *chym(e)ialchem(e)ia*⁴³ indicate that its origins and etymology are obscure.⁴⁴ The spelling *chymia* probably links the word with *chyma* (“fluid,” “ingot”) and *chymos* (“juice”), both derivatives of the verb *cheo* (“to pour,” “to diffuse”). The spelling *chymeia*, including *chymeusis*, *chymeutes*, and *chymeutikos*, likely derives from the verb *chymeuo* (“to fuse”). On the other hand, Plutarch states that the Egyptians called their land *Chemia*, because of its black soil.⁴⁵ Some scholars claim that this spelling might echo the Egyptian origins of alchemy, and in this case it could be interpreted as “the Egyptian art.”⁴⁶ There is one other explanation of the term. George Synkellos († after 810) quotes a passage from Zosimos of Panopolis’ lost work *Imouth*. Zosimos describes how certain angels lusted after women and taught them every work of nature. Because they did this and taught mankind everything wicked they were expelled from heaven. Theirs was the first teaching concerning these arts and so “he called this book *Chemeu*, whence also the art is called ‘alchemy’ (*chemeia*).”⁴⁷ According to Zosimos’ fragment, which harks back to the Book of Enoch,⁴⁸ both the origins and the naming of alchemy are supernatural. Although it is possible that the name *Chemeu* was due to pareymology, this interpretation of the discipline’s origins by an immense authority such as Zosimos could have played a decisive role in disseminating the spelling *chemeia*.

The concept of a unique, revered, and inestimably valuable text on alchemy is not restricted to the supernatural book *Chemeu*. In an entry of the *Souda*, the myth of the Golden Fleece is given an alchemical interpretation: it was not literally a golden skin but rather a book written on skins, describing the making of gold through *chemeia*.⁴⁹ Moreover, Eustathios of Thessalonike (c. 1115–1195/6) preserves the view of Charax of Pergamos (second century),⁵⁰ who construed the “Golden Fleece” as a method of writing on parchment in letters of gold (*chrysographia*).⁵¹

Whether referring to *cheolchymeuo*, Egypt, or an angelic teaching, the term’s main spellings – *chym(e)ialchem(e)ia* – eventually coincided through the effect of iotacism, concluded in Byzantium around the tenth

⁴³ See *LSJ* 1996: s.vv. χημεία, -ευτικός, χυμεία, -ευτικός; Sophocles 1914: s.vv. χημεία, χυμεία, χύμευσις, χυμειτής, χυμειτικός, χυμειύω, χύμη; Lampe 1961: s.vv. χυμειτής, χυμειτής.

⁴⁴ Lindsay 1970: 68–89; Halleux 1979: 45–47; Mertens 2006: 227–228 nn. 69–70.

⁴⁵ Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 33.364c. ⁴⁶ Principe 2013: 23; also Fraser 2004: 128 and n. 11.

⁴⁷ George Synkellos, *Selections from Chronographers* 14.2–14. See Festugière 1944: 255–256; Mertens 1984: 64–68; 1989; 1995: xciii–xcvi; Fraser 2004; Martelli 2013: 60–61; 2014: 9–15.

⁴⁸ Black 1970: 10.

⁴⁹ *Souda*, s.v. Δέρας (Δ 250). Cf. John of Antioch, ed. Roberto, fr. 26.3, lines 11–16.

⁵⁰ *Souda*, s.v. Χάραξ (X 95).

⁵¹ Eustathios, *Commentary on Dionysios Periegetes* 340,38–41. On alchemical interpretations of the Golden Fleece, see Favre 1993. On Byzantine recipes for writing in gold, see Schreiner and Oltrogge 2011.

century.⁵² Yet in certain late authors, for example Kosmas the Hieromonk and John Kanaboutzes (fifteenth century), the spelling *chymia* is favored. Kanaboutzes states that the discipline is called *chymia* and owes its appellation to its function: “it dissolves any metal and makes it like poured water without fire and fusion,”⁵³ an interpretation linking etymologically *chymia* to the verb *cheo*. Thus terms such as *chymia* – or *chrysopaia* (“gold-making”)⁵⁴ – reflect a shift in emphasis from the discipline in general to certain of its goals and methods. In this context, in the text attributed to Kosmas the Hieromonk, *chymia* is perceived as “deliverance from the malicious disease of poverty.”⁵⁵

The mention of alchemy in non-chemical texts allows us to delineate its perception in the broader culture. For instance, the *Souda*'s entries on *chemeia* and the Golden Fleece point to three features of “the sacred art” that probably would have been known by the educated Byzantine of the middle period: (a) its technical orientation, given its goals, i.e. *chrysopaia* (“gold-making”) and *argyropaia* (“silver-making”); (b) its antique authoritative tradition, stemming from the alchemical milieu of ancient Egypt; and (c) its textual character, deriving from the reference to Egyptian alchemical books, as well as from the interpretation of the Golden Fleece as a book. However, it is not until the end of the fifth century that alchemy appears in literature as “a contemporary reality,”⁵⁶ implying that it was previously somewhat marginal.⁵⁷ Proklos (412–485) and Aineias of Gaza (fifth–sixth centuries) provide the earliest known references.⁵⁸ Leaving definitions and interpretations aside, the best-known references may be roughly classified into five groups: (i) ancient alchemical authorities; (ii) alchemical operations and imagery as an analogy or example; (iii) “chemical” terminology in artisanal fields; (iv) descriptions of alchemical subjects; and (v) prohibited and/or fraudulent alchemical activities, which will be discussed in the last section.

(i) The first group comprises references to prominent alchemical authorities, usually designated by the term “philosopher.” George Synkellos mentions Demokritos the Abderite, “the natural philosopher,” who was initiated by Ostanos the Mede in the temple of Memphis together with other priests and philosophers, including Mary the Jewess and Pammenes. Synkellos, referring actually to pseudo-Demokritos, mentions that this

⁵² Adrados 2005: 237. ⁵³ John Kanaboutzes, *Commentary on Dionysios of Halikarnassos* 11,3–5.

⁵⁴ *Chrysopaia* in Synesios (*To Dioskoros: Notes on Demokritos' Book*, § 5.43 [p. 126], § 6.74 [p. 128], § 8.108, III [p. 130], § 17.274 [p. 144], § 18.299 [p. 146], § 19.306 [p. 148]), Stephanos (*On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 199,4, 204,27), and Kosmas (*Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making* 66,2).

⁵⁵ Kosmas, *Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making*, § 1, p. 66,7–8. On poverty as an incurable disease and alchemy, see Colinet 2010: 93 n. 64 and 117 n. 4.

⁵⁶ Halleux 1979: 61. ⁵⁷ Mertens 2006: 226.

⁵⁸ Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, v. 2, 234,17–19. Aineias of Gaza, *Theophrastos* 62,27–63,2. Cf. Mertens 2006: 226.

author wrote about gold, silver, stones, and purple in an indirect way.⁵⁹ Synkellos associates in this passage legendary alchemical authorities as co-students, and gives precedence to Ostanos as their instructor, implying a tradition of Persian alchemical knowledge, which was transmitted in Egypt and diffused into three subsequent schools, the Greek (Demokritos), the Jewish (Maria), and the Egyptian (Pammenes). This reference, as well as that to Zosimos' passage on the *Chemeu*, implies that Synkellos was acquainted with alchemical literature. Furthermore, it reflects the common notion that alchemical instruction should be veiled to the uninitiated.

As expected, Zosimos of Panopolis is the most cited. Photios reports in his *Bibliothēke* that the anonymous author of a Christian apologetic book, who lived after the reign of Herakleios, also utilized the alchemical works of Zosimos.⁶⁰ This points to a use of Zosimos' writings in the seventh century,⁶¹ when alchemy was in vogue, as mentioned above. The interest on Zosimos and the diffusion of his work is implied by the entry on him in the *Souda*. He is described as a "philosopher" and author of "alchemical writings" (*chemeutika*), arranged alphabetically into twenty-eight volumes, and entitled by some as *Things Wrought by Hand (Cheirokeuta)*.⁶² The testimony of the *Souda* crucially affords us a glimpse of Zosimos' lost works.⁶³

(ii) The allusions to alchemy by Proklos and Aineias fit in the second group. A further instance is that of the monk Philippos Monotropos, who, in his didactic poem *Dioptra* (1095), employs the example of transformation of lead into gold by an alchemist to show that God will likewise transform human nature.⁶⁴

(iii) References to the term *chymeutos/cheimeutos*,⁶⁵ literally meaning "fused"⁶⁶ and denoting enamel decorated objects,⁶⁷ are traced in various literary texts. The term is associated etymologically with the verb *chymeuo*, indicating a common root with the terminology examined above.

⁵⁹ Synkellos, *Selections from Chronographers* 297,23–298,2. Cf. the similar reference of Synesios the alchemist to Demokritos' initiation by Ostanos and to the content of Demokritos' books (*To Dioskoros: Notes on Demokritos' Book*, § 1.5–14 [p. 122]). See Martelli 2013: 69–73.

⁶⁰ Photios, *Bibliothēke*, cod. 170 (v. 2, 163,28–30).

⁶¹ Schamp 1987: 108 n. 3; Mertens 1995: xcvi–xcvii; 2006: 219; Magdalino 2006a: 47–48.

⁶² *Souda*, s.v. Ζώσιμος (Z 168). Cf. Mertens 1995: xcvi–ci; 2006: 215, 219. On the *Cheirokeuta*, see Mertens 1995: lxxxvii–lxxxviii; Martelli 2013: 44–47.

⁶³ Mertens 1995: ci–cv.

⁶⁴ Philippos Monotropos, *Dioptra* 133–134; cf. Mertens 2006: 227. On the *Dioptra*, see Afentoulidou–Leitgeb 2012a and 2012b.

⁶⁵ E.g. Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies* 1.17 (v. 1, 99,15), 2.15 (v. 1, 571,15, 572,16, 580,13 and 18–19, 581,9–11, 597,19), 2.40 (v. 1, 640,12–15); Parani et al. 2003: 147–149; Gautier 1984: 119–121.

⁶⁶ Sophocles 1914: s.v. χυμευτός.

⁶⁷ For enamels in Byzantium, see Wessel 1967; Hetherington 1988; Papamastorakis 2006.

The related term *chymeutikos* broadly means “alchemical.”⁶⁸ But it should be noted that a recipe entitled *Peri Chymeutikes* describes a method for dyeing crystals.⁶⁹ Also, the term *cheimeusis* is used by Eustathios of Thessalonike in his *Commentary on the Iliad* in a context related with dark-blue (*dia kyanou*) enameling,⁷⁰ while the same term is employed in the *Souda* to define *cheimeia*.⁷¹ This terminology eloquently reveals the links between the industry of luxury goods and alchemy, indicating that certain techniques could be used in both alchemical and artisanal contexts. In this framework it should be stressed that sometimes, rather than being an exclusive alchemical method, a technique is defined as “alchemical” by the context in which it is found (such as a specialized manuscript). A distinct feature of alchemical practice is the combination of terminology and techniques which vary in origin and are drawn from diverse fields such as metallurgy, goldsmithery, dyeing, but also medicine and pharmacy, and even cookery.⁷²

(iv) There is an exceptional case: John Kanaboutzes outlines alchemy’s principles in a commentary on Dionysios of Halikarnassos,⁷³ dedicated to Palamede Gattilusio († 1455), the Genoese lord of Ainos and Samothrace. A lengthy description is reserved for the “art of *chymia*,” which appears in the commentary’s preface within the context of *sophia*. Kanaboutzes states that *chymia* derives from “the high and contemplative philosophy on the nature of beings,” and describes it as the art of transmuting metals, dyeing stones and crystals in any color, and the dissolution and reconstitution of pearls. Transmutation of metals is performed by the “philosophers’ stone” (*lithos ton philosophon*),⁷⁴ a name given by philosophers to deceive the uninstructed. Kanaboutzes’ discussion is significant since, besides offering a popularized synopsis, it introduces the terms *arkymia* – which, according to him, some Latins used speaking vulgarly instead of the correct *arte kymia* – and *lapis philosophorum* (all transliterated into Greek). He had probably come across these terms in a work of Latin origin or in a multicultural scholarly milieu, such as those that existed in the Gattilusio lordships.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ E.g. Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 220, 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 353, 26–354, 4; cf. 353, 19; also Martelli 2013: 62.

⁷⁰ Eustathios, *Commentary on Homer’s Iliad*, v. 3, 142, 6; cf. v. 4, 247, 2.

⁷¹ *Souda*, s.v. Χεϊμεία (X 227).

⁷² Papathanassiou 1990: 124–125; 2005: 120–121. Cf. Halleux 1981: 28.

⁷³ Kanaboutzes, *Commentary on Dionysios of Halikarnassos* 10, 26–12, 14; see Sakorrafou and Merianos 2014. For an English translation of Kanaboutzes’ text, see Kaldellis 2015a: 113–170. On the commentary and its significance for alchemical traditions, see Goulet-Cazé 2000.

⁷⁴ Nikephoros Blemmydes, *On Gold-Making with Eggs* (Περὶ τῆς ὀφθαλμοποιίας) 452, 7, also refers to the “philosophers’ stone” (*lithos ton sophon*). On this work, see Colinet 2000b: 166, 171, 175, 177.

⁷⁵ On the Gattilusio, see Wright 2014.

DIRECTIONS OF ALCHEMY

Alchemical authors and practitioners seem to be primarily engaged with one of the two overlapping alchemical directions, the philosophical and the technical, according to their individual tendencies and not to distinct goals set by alchemy. Alchemy's transmutational objectives are set in the context of *philosophia*. Thus, Stephanos of Alexandria employs a traditional definition of philosophy: "assimilation to God as far as this is possible to man."⁷⁶ Alchemy attempts to apply philosophical principles in practice; it is therefore a field combining philosophy with laboratory operations, the "know-why" with the "know-how." The practitioner is a demiurge in scale, resembling God as craftsman. Plato and Aristotle played a decisive role in providing alchemy with theoretical tools and imagery for the constitution of matter and its transformations.⁷⁷ The *Timaios*, for instance, represents the demiurge as a metallurgist (41d4), a description which greatly affected alchemical authors.⁷⁸ Neoplatonism matched these philosophical traditions, and further elaborated notions such as cosmic sympathy,⁷⁹ furnishing alchemy with adapted philosophical conceptions.⁸⁰ Authors such as Michael Psellos and Nikephoros Blemmydes interested in natural philosophy – in its turn influenced by late antique Neoplatonic Aristotelianism⁸¹ – were also attracted to alchemy.

Not all "alchemical" authors were interested in laboratory experiments. The recipes contained in the work of Psellos, as well as the collections of recipes bearing the names of Blemmydes and Kosmas the Hieromonk, give the impression of not having been tested.⁸² Owing to its philosophical background and its perception as "practical philosophy," alchemy attracted scholars actively engaged in the study and teaching of philosophy, who nonetheless were primarily thinkers not practitioners.⁸³ Stephanos of Alexandria even strongly criticized dependence on alchemical apparatus.⁸⁴

If we had to pick one author to discuss in detail, that would be Psellos. His alchemical treatise is not the most sophisticated or the more extensive, but it provides the only known synopsis of alchemical concepts circulating in eleventh-century Byzantium – close to the copying of Marc. Gr. 299 – which were filtered by Psellos' acute perspective. His letter-treatise *How to*

⁷⁶ Stephanos, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 224,27–28. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b; Plotinos, *Enneads* 1.2.1.4, 1.4.16.10–13. Stephanos provides here one of the six definitions of philosophy, following the tradition of Neoplatonic commentators, which had a great appeal later, e.g. John of Damascus, *Dialectica (recensio fusior)*, 3.1–27 (v. 1, 56), 66.1–15 (v. 1, 136–137); Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, 49.109–124.

⁷⁷ Especially Plato's *Timaios* and the fourth book of Aristotle's *Meteorologica*: Viano 2005 and 2002, respectively.

⁷⁸ Viano 2005: 103–104. ⁷⁹ Ierodiakonou 2006. ⁸⁰ Cf. Viano 2005: 93 n. 10.

⁸¹ Bydén 2011. ⁸² Mertens 2006: 224–225. ⁸³ Cf. Principe 2013: 25.

⁸⁴ Stephanos, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 206,7–13, 232,5–30, 233,5–13; see Papathanassiou 1990: 124.

Make Gold is considered a work of his youth⁸⁵ dedicated to the patriarch Michael I Keroularios (1043–1058).⁸⁶ The interest in alchemy is embedded in this “Renaissance man’s” endeavor to acquire knowledge.⁸⁷ Psellos justifies his polymathy, stating that “a philosopher ought to be omnifarious.”⁸⁸ In another instance, he offers a twofold explanation of his interest in every field of knowledge: it is owed to his insatiable love of learning, combined with his willingness to know even the methods of forbidden arts in order to refute their practitioners.⁸⁹ Although he does not name these “forbidden arts,” he likely means the “occult” (theurgy, divination, astrology, demonology),⁹⁰ not alchemy. Nevertheless, the term could have been employed in any case to protect him from censure,⁹¹ as shown in his subsequent renunciation of alchemy in the *Indictment of Keroularios* (below).

Psellos’ perception of the alchemical process is “rationalistic” and could be characterized as “proto-scientific,” as he struggles to underline that transmutation of matter happens by natural alteration, not spells, wonder-working, or other ineffable practices.⁹² Psellos’ interpretative method is to investigate the causes of effects through reason.⁹³ The study of transmutation presupposes an inquiry into the nature and qualities of the elements (fire, air, water, earth), of which everything consists and to which it is analyzed.⁹⁴ Psellos explains the natural process of transmutation (*metabole*) in terms of rearranging the proportions of the four elements,⁹⁵ thereby discovering its cause in “natural laws.” He was inclined to make a general systematic treatment and examine every processing of matter (*hylourgia*), such as that of gems, pearls, etc., but the patriarch’s sole preference to gold-making constrained him to deal only with this.⁹⁶ Psellos lists techniques for making gold (or rather for gilding metals), brightening it, doubling its mass, and making a golden dye.⁹⁷ Having described the recipes, he asks rhetorically whether he should briefly reveal to Keroularios all the Abderite (i.e. pseudo-Demokritean) wisdom without leaving anything inside the innermost sanctuary.⁹⁸ In this way, Psellos chooses to characterize alchemical practice by the work of pseudo-Demokritos, considered as one of the

⁸⁵ Psellos, *How to Make Gold* 28,28–30; see Bidez 1928: 3.

⁸⁶ Bidez 1928: 3–25; Grosdidier de Matons 1976: 329–330; Hunger 1978: v. 2, 281; Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 18; Katsiampoura 2008; Martelli 2014: 2–3, 5.

⁸⁷ Duffy 2002; Kaldellis 2007: 191–219.

⁸⁸ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, 114.2 (*On the Genealogy of Christ since Adam*). Cf. Duffy 2002: 149–150; Kaldellis 2007: 195.

⁸⁹ Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, 32.100–106 (*On Incredible Reports*); cf. Duffy 2002: 148–149. See also Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 28c–29a; cf. Kaldellis 2007: 196.

⁹⁰ On Psellos and the “occult,” see Grosdidier de Matons 1976; Duffy 1995; Athanassiadi 2002; Burns 2006; Ierodiakonou 2006; Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 15–21, 27–35; Mavroudi 2014b.

⁹¹ Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 28–29. ⁹² Psellos, *How to Make Gold* 30,16–18; cf. 26,8–11.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 26,15–18. ⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 26,19–28,12. ⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 28,13–30,15. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 30,19–32,9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 34,10–40,5. Cf. Colinet 2010: 119 nn. 24, 27, 120 nn. 29–34.

⁹⁸ Psellos, *How to Make Gold* 40,6–7.

founders of the alchemical art. It is noteworthy that Psellos' treatise enjoyed some dissemination,⁹⁹ as shown by the *Anonymous of Zuretti*,¹⁰⁰ by recipes from the collection attributed to Kosmas,¹⁰¹ and a recipe in Par. Gr. 2419.¹⁰²

In 1058 Psellos composed an *Indictment of Keroularios* on behalf of the emperor Isaac I Komnenos (1057–1059), which was never delivered because the patriarch died before trial. The *Indictment* itemizes charges such as heresy, tyranny, murder, and sacrilege.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, Psellos also refers to the prelate's interest in alchemy. The patriarch was fervently engaged with alchemical operations; seeking the transmutation of base to precious metals, he studied Zosimos and Theophrastos, and regarded highly the Abderite and Demokritean treatise.¹⁰⁴ Psellos' reference implies familiarity with works of the Greek alchemical corpus.¹⁰⁵ He stresses that Keroularios was unable to accomplish anything: "iron again came out iron and copper came out gold only in color; he did not know the proportions, neither did he weigh."¹⁰⁶ Psellos implies that the patriarch was an amateur – as the emphasis on the lack of quantification shows¹⁰⁷ – and he certainly had not achieved producing real gold. The sole outcome of Keroularios' occupation with alchemy was imitation,¹⁰⁸ making copper look like gold in color. Psellos was aware of alchemical techniques for imitation, and he himself described in his treatise techniques for gilding and making a golden dye.

Psellos then makes a preemptive defense, claiming that he had already renounced his knowledge of alchemy as foolery. He publicly admits his past interest, before the accused prelate could have the chance to reveal it, and thus shakes off his contribution to Keroularios' ongoing interests. However, Psellos stresses that the latter's preoccupation with alchemy was perhaps blameworthy but not suitable for a formal accusation. The real problem was that the patriarch processed gold in secret, which violated Byzantine legislation.¹⁰⁹ The implication of alchemy in the charges seems

⁹⁹ Bidez 1928: 16–18. ¹⁰⁰ *Anonymous of Zuretti*, § 97.3, p. 180, 16–24.

¹⁰¹ Kosmas, *Explanation of the Science of Gold-Making*, §§ 4–8, pp. 68–70. See Colinet 2010: cxxix, cxxxvi.

¹⁰² Colinet 2010: R 35, p. 19, 1–8.

¹⁰³ Dennis 1994: 190–192; Papaioannou 2013: 153–154, 218–219.

¹⁰⁴ Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2670–2677 (*Indictment of Keroularios*). For a French translation and commentary on the passages relating to alchemy, see Bidez 1928: 71–89.

¹⁰⁵ Bidez 1928: 22. Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2674–2675 (*Indictment*) seems to allude to Zosimos' *Kat' energeian* treatise. See Bidez 1928: 86–87 n. 16; Mertens 2006: 216 and n. 25, 219. Letrouit (1995: 33) rejects Zosimos' authorship of this work.

¹⁰⁶ Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2686–2689 (*Indictment*). Psellos had challenged Keroularios' scientific inconsistency before; see his *Letter to Michael Keroularios* 2d61–65.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Bidez 1928: 23 and n. 5.

¹⁰⁸ On the definition of counterfeit, forgery, and imitation, see the relevant entries in Doty 1982.

¹⁰⁹ Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2690–2695 (*Indictment*). On the relevant legislation, see Grierson 1956; Hendy 1985: 320–328.

to serve a twofold purpose: to underline the patriarch's obsession for gold and his willingness to resort to every means to acquire it, implying his moral decline; and to present alchemy as an art providing techniques for counterfeiting and gilding, activities which are subsequently mentioned in the *Indictment* (see the last section below).

Psellos offers a rare opportunity to examine alchemy's main directions, as perceived in the eleventh century. On the one hand, his treatise reveals the attraction for scholars of its theoretical aspects, especially for those who were familiar with philosophical and esoteric trends, grafted with ideas which Persian and Egyptian immigrants brought to Constantinople.¹¹⁰ These scholars' interest in alchemy was rather "armchair,"¹¹¹ perhaps because theory excelled practice in ancient and medieval thinking.¹¹² On the other hand, Psellos implies in the *Indictment* that the theoretical dimension of alchemy and its transmutational goals were mere nonsense, and that every possible tangible result was rather only imitation. Still, Psellos was perhaps pushed by circumstances to appear to have already renounced alchemy. A hint of this is the representation of the patriarch as an amateur who was not aware of proportion and weighing, thus lacking "scientific" accuracy; Keroularios was not a "philosopher," but a superficial user of poorly assimilated knowledge.

The differences between "armchair" and practical alchemy, as portrayed by Psellos, are noticeable even in the texts of the principal manuscripts. For example, Par. Gr. 2325 reveals an interest in alchemical recipes, as its focus is on technical texts, making the codex appear as a textbook for use in a workshop.¹¹³ The luxuriously illustrated Marc. Gr. 299, on the other hand, includes mostly theoretical texts, as it was possibly destined for an important and educated person or even the imperial library.¹¹⁴

As made evident by Psellos, even though alchemy was not exclusively engaged with transmutation into gold, metallic transmutation was thought to be its objective *par excellence*. The pursuit of gold stands as an alchemical emblem, since gold, apart from being the most valued metal, held a wide range of symbolic and philosophical connotations.¹¹⁵ Consequently, the discipline was often identified with one of its objectives, obviously the most esteemed and potentially lucrative one, and it is thus perceived as an aurific art both by enthusiasts of alchemy and by laymen. As Martelli showed, since the earliest phases of alchemy there existed two tendencies concerning its conception: one regarded alchemy as an art encompassing a variety of dyeing techniques for metals, precious stones, and fabrics, and another conceived it only in terms of metallic transformation. The second notion was relatively dominant in Byzantium (cf. the *Souda's* definition), and

¹¹⁰ Magdalino 2006a: 91–107; cf. Bidez 1928: 23. ¹¹¹ Cf. Principe 2013: 25.

¹¹² Magdalino and Mavroudi 2006: 28. ¹¹³ Festugière 1939: 87, 90; Mertens 2006: 208, 224.

¹¹⁴ Saffrey 1995: 2; Mertens 2006: 207, 224. ¹¹⁵ Viano 2005: 100–102.

points to the loss of part of the alchemical literature that was not about the making of precious metals. On the other hand, a broad set of dyeing techniques was transmitted to Byzantium and beyond.¹¹⁶ Indeed, in Byzantium alchemy encompassed a series of chemical technologies and metallurgical advances which were effective in imitating real valuables. Because of this, terms related to *chemeialchymeialcheimeia* sometimes acquired a rather pejorative sense, as linked with charlatanism.¹¹⁷

ALCHEMY, INDUSTRY, AND THE STATE

The attribution of alchemical texts to Justinian and Herakleios has already been pointed out. In addition, in an Arabic source ‘Umāra ibn Ḥamza, ambassador of the caliph al-Manṣūr (754–775), is said to have reported how the emperor Constantine V (741–775) demonstrated in his presence a transmutation of lead into silver and copper into gold with the aid of a white and a red powder, respectively.¹¹⁸ These cases illustrate that alchemy was considered an art fit for royalty. Furthermore, Keroularios’ interest in gold-making shows that even a patriarch could be attracted to alchemy. Thus, despite the modern view that the state persecuted alchemical practice by default, the widely known relevant cases in Byzantine sources are just two: the burning of the Egyptian alchemical books and the exile of John Isthmeos. It is noteworthy that both of them are early episodes linked to economic motives. We will look at them shortly.

Examining one of the gilding methods may add insight to the possible threats that alchemical operations posed to the state’s prerogatives. By applying a gold-mercury (Au-Hg) amalgam to the surface of the object, then removing the mercury by heat, amalgam plating could leave a thin layer of gold. This was an antique method for plating objects,¹¹⁹ in use since Hellenistic times:¹²⁰ for example, P. Leid. x contains recipes that use amalgam plating for gilding, and no. 55 in particular bears the title *To Make Silver Gilded for Ages to Come (eis aiona monimon)*.¹²¹ Codex Par. Gr. 2327 also contains a technique for amalgam gilding (*Explanation of*

¹¹⁶ Martelli 2013: 57–63; 2014. ¹¹⁷ Cf. Lory 1994: 92 n. 7.

¹¹⁸ Strohmaier 1991; Rochow 1994: 85, 86–87; Gutas 1998: 115–116; Psaroudakis 2013. This kind of dry powder was called *xerion* in Greek (*xerion* > *al-iksir* > *elixir(ium)*), a medicinal term. It indicated the agent of transmutation, which was also known as the “philosophers’ stone”; see e.g. Blemmydes, *On Gold-Making with Eggs* 457,11–12; Principe 2013: 26, 39.

¹¹⁹ Some caution is required regarding the use of terminology in bibliography, for example sometimes “enrichment” is employed interchangeably with “plating.” Evidently, this occurs when the same term is used in a free sense or to describe a particular technique (such is often the case with the terms “silver-clad” and “silver-wash”).

¹²⁰ Vlachou 2004: 121–124, 131–132. See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33,20 and 33,32; cf. Dufault 2015: 235.

¹²¹ Halleux 1981: 97,322–98,331; cf. 98 n. 1.

Gilding),¹²² while a method for amalgam silvering – using a silver-mercury (Ag-Hg) amalgam – is included in the same manuscript (*On Gilding Copper with Silver*).¹²³

Vlachou has shown that amalgam silvering was most likely applied to debased late Roman coins made of quaternary alloy (Cu-Sn-Pb-Ag) as a means to provide a proper silvery appearance. By the end of Gallienus' reign (268) the precious metal content in the *antoninianus* had reached about 2.5%, tin and lead increased in the alloy, and amalgam silvering was applied.¹²⁴ Subsequently, Diocletian during his monetary reform (c. 293/4) introduced the *nummus*, using the same method to create the silver-clad surface of a complex quaternary alloy coin.¹²⁵ In debasing the coinage, Roman authorities may have drawn some experience from the manipulation of the Egyptian billon currency.¹²⁶ As coins produced in the Alexandrian mint had been debased long before those minted elsewhere, it has plausibly been suggested that amalgam silvering was most probably developed in Alexandria.¹²⁷ If so, the burning of alchemical books in Egypt, in the aftermath of a local rebellion, may have been a repercussion of Diocletian's coinage reform.¹²⁸ The possession of techniques through which currency could be successfully manipulated in an insurgent Roman province must have troubled the authorities for obvious reasons. Amalgam plating and the burning of alchemical books can be construed as a case-study of the complex relation between metallurgical advances, alchemical experiments, and politico-economic developments.

The other known case of state persecution is the banishment of John Isthmeos, a story narrated by John Malalas (sixth century). Isthmeos was an "alchemist" (*cheimeutes*) from Amida who, during the reign of Anastasios I (491–518), appeared in Antioch. He secretly went into the workshops of the silversmiths (*argyropatia*) and showed them hands and feet of statues and figurines made of gold, claiming that he had found a hoard full of them. After having tricked many out of their money, Isthmeos escaped to Constantinople, where he conned many silversmiths until the emperor became aware of him and banished him to Petra, where he died.¹²⁹

¹²² Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 322,11–23; see Vlachou 2004: 133, 136–137, 141, 145, 146, 148. Cf. Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 328,21–329,1.

¹²³ Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 328,14–20. See Vlachou 2004: 150–151; Vlachou-Mogire et al. 2007: 560.

¹²⁴ As Vlachou (2004: 366) notes, the previous common practice employed a binary (Cu-Ag) alloy.

¹²⁵ Vlachou 2004: 366; Vlachou-Mogire et al. 2007: 558. Additionally, see Harl 1996: 125–157; Hendy 1985: 449–462; Abdy 2012: 586–588.

¹²⁶ Harl 1996: 123–124, 127. ¹²⁷ Vlachou 2004: 368.

¹²⁸ Cf. Lindsay 1970: 54–57; Halleux 1981: 23–24; Principe 2013: 22–23, 61. For the possible links between alchemy and late Roman minting, see Keyser 1995–1996; cf. Vlachou 2004: 103–104.

¹²⁹ Malalas, *Chronicle* 16.5 (p. 323,62–74). Cf. Berthelot 1885: 76–77; Letrouit 1995: 56–57; Mertens 2006: 226–227.

Later chroniclers embedded Isthmeos' story into their works, mostly without naming him. In George the Monk (ninth century) the word *cheimeutes* has been replaced by *chrysochoos* ("goldsmith"). George Kedrenos (twelfth century) elaborates the story by adding that this *cheimeutes* was an expert in the arts of "alchemy" (*cheime*), and managed to deceive the eyes (*ophthalmoplanesai*) by fraud.¹³⁰ Kedrenos' choice to describe the activity of Isthmeos as eye-deceiving is revealing, since his tale implies that alchemical practice sometimes entailed fraud. This perception was not only a Byzantine one; in an Arabic text, for instance, there is a story of some Byzantine traders who paid a Muslim alchemist for false gold bars, and later demanded their money back.¹³¹ The manufacture of golden objects that fooled even specialized artisans indicates that perhaps Isthmeos was a goldsmith, as George the Monk characterizes him. In any case, excluding recipes which required everyday utensils or specialized alchemical apparatus, the use of costly or industrial equipment points to wealthy persons or to those with access to the artisanal milieu. It is possible that Graeco-Egyptian alchemists used the equipment and workshops of craftsmen of various technical fields;¹³² this could apply to Byzantine alchemists as well.

The Roman, and later the Byzantine, state legislated against counterfeiting,¹³³ reserving the most severe punishment for those who adulterated gold coinage. Interestingly, the main suspects of these actions were often mint workers, who were punished more harshly than private persons. This indicates that counterfeiting sometimes required the knowledge and status of an official craftsman. Relevant allusions or recipes can be found in the Greek alchemical corpus: for instance, Zosimos states, in the context of a comparison, that "craftsmen who know how to strike an imperial coin are not to strike it for themselves, for they will be punished."¹³⁴ Marc. Gr. 299 includes a remarkable text¹³⁵ on how to make hollow molds (*phourmai*)¹³⁶ – executed in negative relief – as well as "lumps" (*tyloi*), i.e. casts. Both are to be made of bronze (*brontesion*),¹³⁷ and can be used to imitate any gold coin.

¹³⁰ Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* 150,12–22; George the Monk, *Chronicle*, v. 2, 622,9–18; Symeon Logothetes, *Chronicle* 102.10 (p. 136,53–60); Kedrenos, *Summary Historical Compilation*, v. 1, 629,8–17.

¹³¹ Brubaker and Haldon 2001: 304. ¹³² Martelli 2011b.

¹³³ Grierson 1956; Hendy 1985: 320–328. ¹³⁴ Zosimos, *Final Quittance* 364,6–9.

¹³⁵ Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 375,9–377,6; cf. Papathanassiou 2002: 123–124; Merianos 2014: 251–253.

¹³⁶ On *phourmai*, see also Berthelot and Ruelle 1887–1888: v. 2, 220,13; 326,12–26; 378,2; 379,4–7; Martelli 2013: 62 n. 362; Merianos and Sakorafou 2013: 52 and n. 30.

¹³⁷ On *brontesion*, see Trapp et al. 2001: s.v. βροντήσιον; Papathanassiou 2002: 123 n. 14; Martelli 2013: 62 n. 363.

Legislation against imitation and trickery was not restricted to the protection of the coinage. The second chapter of the tenth-century *Book of the Eparch* – which regulated the activity of certain guilds in Constantinople – refers to silversmiths (*argyropratai*), who processed gold, silver, pearls, and gemstones exclusively.¹³⁸ Paragraphs 2.5 and 2.10 show that the alteration of precious metals entailed severe punishment (cutting off the hand), and that the work of the silversmith had to be performed under supervision in the workshops of the Mese and not in a silversmith's household.¹³⁹ The latter stipulation likely aimed to preclude fraud and counterfeiting.

Psellos' testimony in the *Indictment* confirms the engagement of craftsmen in illegal gold processing. Psellos refers to them in the context of the patriarch's interest in the "art of gold-making,"¹⁴⁰ and his accusation is that the law severely punishes the secret processing and appropriation of gold by state craftsmen. The penalty for those receiving them or being implicated in the adulteration of gold includes confiscation and banishment or labor in mines, and also deposition for a cleric.¹⁴¹ Psellos reveals what it was that led him to level this charge against the patriarch:

As he was about to gild (*katakechrysothai*) the church, so as not to pay the "gold weavers" too much money he called them and placed them apart in an underground room of his own somewhere near the church . . . So as not to diminish his cash reserves too much, he earned such dishonor.¹⁴²

Although Psellos is referring to craftsmen, not alchemists, the secret processing of gold in an underground room is reminiscent of the cliché of secret alchemical operations. However, the action that he explicitly mentions and that is persistently linked with alchemical techniques is gilding.¹⁴³ Evidently, from the references to Diocletian, Isthmeos, and Keroularios, what was really at stake with the alchemical practices pertained to counterfeiting or imitating of coinage and precious metals. Counterfeiting – among the various ethical, political, and economic issues it raised – diminished public faith in genuine currency and thereby decreased its value.¹⁴⁴ The motives behind the persecution of alchemical practices and practitioners seem to be mainly economic, related to the control of precious metals and monetary production by the state.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ On the guild of *argyropratai*, see Hendy 1985: 242–253; Dagron 2002: 435–438.

¹³⁹ Leo VI the Wise, *Book of the Eparch* 2.5 (p. 86,174–175); 2.10 (p. 88,193–195).

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Bidez 1928: 87–89 n. 24.

¹⁴¹ Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2712–2723 (*Indictment*). Cf. *Basilika* 60.45.7.

¹⁴² Psellos, *Orationes forenses* 1.2726–2732 (*Indictment*). ¹⁴³ Cf. Bidez 1928: 22–23.

¹⁴⁴ Grierson 1956: 240. ¹⁴⁵ Cf. Halleux 1979: 123.

CONCLUSIONS

From Panopolis and Alexandria to Constantinople, the “sacred art” underwent a development that was consistent with the cultural and social milieu of those engaged in its study. Works of ancient authorities, such as pseudo-Demokritos and Zosimos, were collected and read; nonetheless, the extant form of the surviving ancient texts is largely due to the methods of the Byzantine copyists and compilers, who collected, abridged, and copied them according to their own interests or those of the commissioners of the manuscripts, often at the expense of the originals. Along with these ancient works, commentaries on them, as well as original treatises and recipes, were progressively incorporated into the Greek alchemical corpus.¹⁴⁶ Authors with an interest in natural philosophy were attracted to alchemy. This, along with the syncretism of Islamic and western influences, enriched the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical tradition in Byzantium. Furthermore, members of the upper social strata, often lay or ecclesiastical officials, also studied or practiced alchemy. The vogue it enjoyed from the seventh century onwards, as illustrated in the constitution of the Greek alchemical corpus, is perhaps an indication that it formed part of official learning, as Mertens suggests.¹⁴⁷ Its dissemination beyond specialized circles can be traced in various non-alchemical sources from the fifth to the fifteenth century. The relevant references concerning alchemical authors, imagery, terminology, and popularized notions help us reconstruct some aspects of alchemy’s public perception in Byzantium. Finally, alchemy’s multidimensional relation with industry presents us with a discipline less marginal than one might originally think. “Alchemical” techniques concerning imitation and counterfeiting reveal the reason why alchemy was sometimes considered suspicious, but they also imply a range of advances in metallurgy and other artisanal fields.

¹⁴⁶ Mertens 2006: 209–215, 222–224, 228–229. ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 228.

CHAPTER 15
MEDICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

TIMOTHY S. MILLER

In 1978, Herbert Hunger published an excellent survey of Byzantine medical literature from the fourth century to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. As Hunger stressed, ancient Greek medicine as it was formulated in the Hippocratic corpus, and in the many works of the second-century physician Galen of Pergamum, formed the foundations of Byzantine medical writing and practice.¹ This chapter will not retrace Hunger's path, but rather focus on particular writers whose works have wider implications for understanding Byzantine medical history or have recently appeared in critical editions. The principal goal here is to combine what professional medical literature says about Byzantine physicians and their practice with information from non-medical sources such as hagiography, scriptural commentaries, speeches, and narrative histories. These non-medical sources have revealed surprising new facets of medical practice in Byzantium. Finally, the chapter examines the role of hospitals as medical centers. Hunger acknowledged these Christian institutions as important agents of change in medicine, but by introducing new sources and re-examining well-known documents such as the regulations for the Pantokrator monastery, this study emphasizes how physicians reorganized their medical practice around hospital services.² Moreover, it presents new evidence that hospitals (*xenon*, pl. *xenones*, or *nosokomeia* in Greek) were teaching centers and conservators of medical manuscripts.

THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Byzantine physicians and educated laymen continued to read and copy the Hippocratic corpus and the essays of Galen until the final days of the empire. As striking evidence of Galen's significance, more of his works have survived in the Greek manuscript tradition than have those of any other ancient author.³ How many works of other ancient medical writers were available to physicians after 700? On the evidence of Photios'

¹ Hunger 1978: 285–320, esp. 287 for Galen and Hippokrates.

² *Ibid.* 287; cf. Miller 1997: 141–166. ³ Nutton 1995: 60.

Bibliothēke, it seems that few survived into the ninth century, but one of the best works of ancient medicine, *On Acute and Chronic Diseases* by Aretaios of Cappadocia, was preserved almost in its entirety in an independent manuscript tradition.⁴ Because only a few manuscripts contained this work, however, many Byzantine physicians probably never had access to it.

Thanks to two late antique compilers, Oribasios of Pergamum (fourth century) and Aetios of Amida (sixth century), physicians after 700 had available selected passages from several other significant ancient physicians beyond Galen and the Hippocratic corpus.⁵ In compiling his encyclopedia, Oribasios selected passages on the same subject from various physicians of the first and second centuries and reordered these excerpts under thematic chapters (a form of compilation known as a *catena*, or “chain” of linked passages). For example, in his chapter on *elephantiasis* (what Latin sources called leprosy), Oribasios begins with a section from Rufus of Ephesos, followed by Galen’s leprosy section from his *The Method of Healing for Glaukon*. Most of Oribasios’ leprosy chapter, however, consists of a list of palliative drug therapies by the second-century physician Philoumenos.⁶ Aetios of Amida’s encyclopedia employed the same methodology as Oribasios, although Aetios made more changes in his excerpts. Aetios culled sections from Rufus of Ephesos, Archigenes, and other prominent classical physicians.⁷ Since Aetios’ extensive collection survives in at least 140 manuscripts, he made available to Byzantine physicians many observations by ancient medical writers whose works never survived in an independent tradition.⁸ Vivian Nutton once described Oribasios and Aetios as “refrigerators” that preserved medical texts for later generations. Unfortunately, Nutton also included in this group Paul of Aigina (seventh century).⁹ A careful study of Paul’s compendium, however, demonstrates that he was far more than a mere conserver of older texts.

While practicing in seventh-century Alexandria, Paul composed his *Pragmateia*. In the introduction, Paul claimed that Oribasios had prepared an excellent summary of ancient medicine, but his work was too bulky and costly for most physicians. Paul aimed at producing a more concise handbook. He promised that he would reproduce the essential parts of the ancient texts and add only a few of his own observations.¹⁰ A close reading

⁴ Treadgold (1980: 176, s.v. medicine) lists three ancient medical writers, Dionysios of Aegeae, Theon of Alexandria, and Dioskourides, in addition to Galen. Photios’ *Bibliothēke* does not mention Aretaios. For the number of Aretaios’ mss., see Hude’s introduction.

⁵ Sideras 1974: 110–130. ⁶ Oribasios, *Compendium of Medicine* 45.27–29.

⁷ Sideras 1974: 110–116. For Aetios’ use of Archigenes in describing leprosy, see Aetios of Amida, *Compendium of Medicine* 13.120 (pp. 717–718).

⁸ Garzya 1984: 248–249. ⁹ Nutton 1984: 2.

¹⁰ Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* pr. (v. 1, 3–5); commentary by Pormann 2004: 296–297.

of his work, however, reveals that he often added new observations which he had made while treating patients and sometimes tried to harmonize the contradictory opinions of his predecessors. In discussing *elephantiasis*, Paul begins by citing the rare treatise by Aretaios who among ancient physicians had written the best description of leprosy. Although Paul followed Galen's theory that leprosy resulted from an excess of black bile in the body, he adopted Aretaios' view that *elephantiasis* was extremely contagious. Aretaios had belonged to an ancient medical school called the Pneumatists who did not accept Galen's opinion that disease resulted from an imbalance of the four humors – blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile – but believed it arose from corrupted elements in the air which, when inhaled, might alter the *pneuma* (a universal life force) in the body. Paul's account of leprosy artfully combines opposing medical opinions from two rival schools of medicine.¹¹ Based on his own observations, Paul distinguished two types of leprosy: a severe form that destroyed fingers and toes and ultimately ended in death, and a milder form that often disfigured its victims, but was not fatal. Paul maintained that the fatal form of *elephantiasis* occurred when the corruption began in the yellow bile and spread to the black bile while the milder form originated in the black bile itself. Paul was the first physician to distinguish these two forms of leprosy, the distinction which modern clinicians make between lepromatous and tuberculoid Hansen's Disease.¹²

With respect to his treatment of kidney stones, Paul's discussion of the causes and symptoms of the condition derives from the encyclopedias of Oribasios and Aetios, and is ultimately dependent on a work by Rufus of Ephesos.¹³ Paul's extremely detailed section on the surgical removal of kidney stones, however, is not found in any ancient source and obviously derived from his own practice.¹⁴ In describing how to extract kidney stones from the bladder, he states:

We ourselves take up an instrument called the *lithotomos* (stone cutter) and make an incision between the anus and the testicles, not down the middle of the *perinaion*, but on the left side of the buttocks, and cutting diagonally across, we make the incision with the stone as the cutting base.¹⁵

Because Paul's *Pragmateia* survives in over sixty manuscripts, Byzantine physicians probably had easy access to it.¹⁶ Paul's medical summary

¹¹ Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 4.1 (v. 1, 317–323); explanation by Miller and Nesbitt 2014: 51–52. For Aretaios as a Pneumatist, see Oberhelman 1994: 959–966.

¹² Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 4.1 (v. 1, 317); cf. Brody 1974: 27–32. For a more scientific account, see Harrison's *Principles of Internal Medicine* (2008): s.v. Hansen's Disease.

¹³ Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 3.45 (v. 1, 241–243). For Aetios' use of Rufus of Ephesos, see Sideras 1974: 110–113.

¹⁴ Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 6.60 (v. 2, 98–101). ¹⁵ *Ibid.* 100.

¹⁶ See Heiberg's introduction to Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia*, v. 1, v.

influenced subsequent medical writers such as Theophanes Chrysobalantes and John Zacharias.¹⁷ Sometimes, however, later sources did not acknowledge their debt to him. For example, a fourteenth-century list of medical remedies contains a short section on treating kidney stones which derives directly or indirectly from Paul's observation on this subject, but the author of the short entry attributes his information to the fifth-century (BCE) philosopher Demokritos of Abdera.¹⁸

AFTER 700

While Paul was treating patients in Alexandria, the empire underwent a major contraction. As the result of the Arab conquest of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, the military and administrative system initiated drastic changes to concentrate on saving Asia Minor and Constantinople from the onslaught of Muslim land and sea forces. With the loss of Alexandria and the cities of Syria, intellectual life including the medical profession was forced to reorganize in the empire's capital.¹⁹ These profound changes reshaped the medical profession, a process which this chapter examines from several perspectives. With regard to professional literature, the medical texts composed after 700 no longer present detailed discussions of disease symptoms or surgical techniques as the *Pragmateia* did. Instead, the manuscripts are filled with short manuals on phlebotomy, uroscopy, and directions for interpreting pulse beats. Random lists of drug therapies, called *antidotaria* or *iatrosophia*, also become common. Concerning authors and compilers of medical texts composed between 700 and 1300, almost no information survives about their personal lives either in the texts themselves or in extraneous sources.

Mystery surrounds even the most popular of the post-700 texts, the *Epitome on the Curing of Ailments* by Theophanes Chrysobalantes, a text preserved entire in over fifty manuscripts, with excerpts found in many other codices.²⁰ Without a complete study of the manuscript tradition and a resulting critical edition, scholars can make few statements about Theophanes and his work. Although historians have traditionally linked his professional activities to the scholarly circles around the emperor Constantine VII, this identification is by no means certain. Moreover, Theophanes' *Epitome* exists in ten different recensions with another

¹⁷ Sections on leprosy in Theophanes Chrysobalantes, *Epitome*, ch. 233 (v. 2, 216–223) and Zacharias, *On Diagnosis* 2.22 (v. 2, 454–455).

¹⁸ Vat. Gr. 299 (fol. 393). For an analysis of the ms., see Bennett 2003: 166–207.

¹⁹ Browning 1992: 43–69. For changes in the world of medicine, see Miller 1997: 168–175.

²⁰ For fifty mss., see Sonderkamp 1984: 30. Bennett (2003: 57) claims that 104 mss. contain portions of Theophanes' *Epitome*.

version in demotic Greek from a fourteenth-century manuscript.²¹ How did these different versions emerge?

In 1996, Anna Maria Ieraci Bio advanced our understanding of these many texts, composed after 700, when she published the *Medical Manual* of Paul of Nicaea. Her critical edition has matched a unified text with an author and securely dated it to the ninth century.²² Paul's *Manual* provides a good example of the new type of medical treatise that appeared after 700. Paul divided his manual into 133 short chapters, beginning with fevers and subsequently following the *a capite ad calcem* (head to foot) order, an organizational system common to most medical texts composed after 700. Paul opens each chapter with a description of symptoms followed by his recommended therapies.²³ In chapter 77 on kidney stones, where he discusses treatment, he mentions the lithotomy operation, described also by Paul of Aigina, but leaves out any precise instructions on performing the procedure.

If a very large stone should form in the bladder so that the stone continually blocks the urine and prevents it from being expelled, we will make use of the necessary surgery and extract the stone.²⁴

In order to avoid this surgery, however, Paul of Nicaea recommends concoctions of wine and various herbs which would act as a diuretic and help to flush out smaller stones before they become major problems. His manual shares certain similarities with Paul of Aigina's *Pragmateia*, but in this chapter on kidney stones only one of seven plants recommended to flush out the stones is found also in Paul of Aigina's manual.²⁵

Another summary of medicine, similar in structure to the manual of Paul of Nicaea, is Leo's *Synopsis of Medicine*. So far no critical edition of this text is available. As a result, scholars are not sure when it was written, although it is usually assigned to the late ninth century. In general, Leo's treatise follows the same order of subjects as Paul's, although Leo's is divided into 177 chapters instead of 133.²⁶ In his introduction, Leo outlines the order he plans to use in each chapter: first, he identifies the disease by name; second, explains its causes; third, describes its symptoms; and fourth, lists the remedies.²⁷ Leo's presentation differs from Paul's in that he frequently mentions surgery as a therapy whereas Paul rarely does. Like Paul, however, he never provides instructions on how to execute surgical operations beyond occasionally identifying instruments to use.²⁸

²¹ Sonderkamp 1984: 30. ²² See Ieraci Bio's introduction to Paul of Nicaea, 13–17. ²³ *Ibid.* 18.

²⁴ Paul of Nicaea, *Medical Manual* 77 (p. 161, lines 14–16).

²⁵ Paul of Nicaea, *Medical Manual* 77 (p. 161); cf. Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 3.45 (v. 1, 241–243).

²⁶ Leo Medicus, *Synopsis of Medicine* 79–221; for the date of composition, see Zipser 2005: 107–108.

²⁷ For an example of Leo's organization, see *Synopsis of Medicine* 1.5 (93–95); cf. Zipser 2005: 110–111.

²⁸ Zipser 2005: 112–113; Bliquez 1999: 291–301.

According to Laurence Bliquez, who studied surgical references in the *Synopsis*, Leo assumes that the intended audience of his work would have access to the detailed descriptions of operations in Paul of Aigina's *Pragmateia*.²⁹ Barbara Zipser, who also has studied closely the *Synopsis*, suggests that Leo wrote his treatise for physicians who worked in hospitals and had access to other medical books. These physicians or medical students used the *Synopsis* only as a handy reference work.³⁰

In 2007, Barbara Zipser edited another post-700 text which the manuscript tradition associates with a certain John the Archiatros ("chief physician").³¹ Previously, historians had dated this treatment-list to the seventh or eighth century.³² Zipser's careful investigation demonstrates, however, that John's *Therapeutics* was compiled in the thirteenth century and used as its principal sources the *Epitome* of Theophanes and a pharmaceutical text composed by physicians or pharmacists working in a Constantinopolitan hospital.³³ Zipser also discovered that John's *Therapeutics* survives in two versions, one in high-style Greek and an expanded version in more demotic Greek. These two versions differ considerably in content.³⁴ For example, the high-style version contains no chapter on leprosy, but the demotic text includes a substantial list of palliative treatments for victims of this dreaded disease. Surprisingly, John's treatments for leprosy follow closely the therapies recommended by Aretaios of Cappadocia, not those found in Theophanes' *Epitome*.³⁵

Scholars have also been slowly untangling the confused maze of Greek *antidotaria* (books of antidotes) and epitomes composed after 700. As a result, a clearer picture of professional medical texts is slowly emerging. Two medical writers require special comment because their works do not resemble the terse summaries such as Paul of Nicaea's *Manual* or Theophanes' *Epitome*. The first is the ninth-century monk Meletios and the second the fourteenth-century physician John Zacharias. Meletios composed a summary of Greek anatomy and physiology entitled *On the Nature of Man*. He completed his final version of this text in the ninth century, but he may have used several earlier Byzantine works as models, and certainly some of his passages derive from Greek physicians of the Roman era. His anatomy text differs from other Byzantine medical works in that it presents its topic in a flowing and remarkably clear Greek prose. Moreover, Meletios has artfully integrated anatomy with physiology to produce an original amalgam of two fields that Galen and other classical

²⁹ Bliquez 1999: 318–319. ³⁰ Zipser 2005: 113–114.

³¹ See Zipser's introduction to John Archiatros' *Therapeutics* 3–37.

³² Bennett 2003: 71 n. 78 and 262–263.

³³ See Zipser's introduction to John Archiatros' *Therapeutics* 3–11. ³⁴ *Ibid.* 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 73 (pp. 212–214); cf. Aretaios, *On Acute and Chronic Diseases* 8.13.2–13 (pp. 168–170) and Theophanes Chrysobalantes, *Epitome* 233 (v. 2, 220).

physicians had treated separately.³⁶ Meletios also combined observations in patristic sources with passages culled from ancient Greek physicians to give his treatise a pronounced Christian tone.³⁷ Although Meletios adopted some of Galen's anatomical and physiological theories, he also used other ancient sources. Robert Renehan has suggested that he borrowed sections of his treatise from a now lost anatomical study by the famous Methodist physician Soranos of Ephesos (the "Methodists" were a particular school of ancient medical theory).³⁸ Moreover, reading attentively Meletios' chapters on the heart and lungs reveals an understanding of the heart's function which differs from Galen's and seems to reflect Pneumatist ideas (a different school that stressed the role of *pneuma*, or spirit).³⁹ Meletios' summary thus contains passages of ancient physicians whose ideas differed from Galen (the Methodists held that the proper tension of the body's constituent atoms produced good health while Pneumatists saw the proper flow of *pneuma* as key to avoiding sickness). Meletios designed his book for medical students. The manuscript tradition preserves a similar anatomical essay for students, attributed to the Byzantine physician Theophilos. This second anatomy-physiology textbook is related to Meletios' work, but neither is a copy of the other. They both apparently had access to a common archetype, perhaps composed in Constantinople after the loss of Alexandria in the seventh century.⁴⁰

John Zacharias wrote his three medical treatises between 1320 and 1335.⁴¹ In his earliest study *On Urines*, Zacharias explains how physicians can determine subtle distinctions in the color, consistency, and suspensions in urine samples, observed in specially designed urine vials, in order to diagnose diseases and to determine remedies.⁴² Interspersed with his theoretical discussions, Zacharias recounts stories about some particular patients. Instead of the graceless telegraphic style found in most Byzantine medical texts, Zacharias wrote *On Urines* in an attractive yet compact style, possessing much of the grace and clarity of Galen's prose. In one of his case histories, Zacharias portrayed a particularly difficult patient in the following words:

Accordingly, I took with my hands a particular medicine – it was a bitter round pill. I mixed with this pill as much vinegar honey as I thought was suitable. I poured in some hot water so that the medicine would be more liquid and easily

³⁶ Renehan 1984: 159; see the detailed discussion of dating in Holman 2008: 80–82.

³⁷ Renehan 1984: 160; Holman 2008: 86. ³⁸ Renehan 1984: 160–168.

³⁹ Meletios, *On the Nature of Man*, col. 1075–1310. For the section on the heart and lungs, see col. 1211–1218 (chs. 16–17). In favor of the *PG* edition, see Grimm-Stadelmann's introduction to Theophilos' *Anatomy* 53–54.

⁴⁰ See Grimm-Stadelmann's introduction to Theophilos' *Anatomy* 60–63.

⁴¹ Hohlweg 1984: 124–129.

⁴² *Ibid.* 128–129; for the use of urine vials, see Zacharias, *On Urines* 2.1 (pp. 32–33).

swallowed down, and offered it to the patient to drink. He took the cup and placed it to his lips when he noticed some unpleasantness in the medicine because it was indeed bitter. The man was also both arrogant and difficult to deal with, ignoble and resistant to persuasion when it came to taking medicine. I wanted to play a bit with him and also to prove that this haughty person's inclination to vomit was due to the vanity of his soul. Concluding that my pharmacist assistant would suffer nothing terrible, if he were not benefited by the medicine, I gave it to this assistant to drink and said that it would be very beneficial to the body. The assistant took the drinking cup in his hands, placed it to his lips, and after having completely drunk the medicine, displayed the empty goblet.⁴³

Subsequently, Zacharias explains that the medicine had altered the assistant's urine color from its normal yellow to black, but in this case this otherwise deadly symptom resulted from the medicine, not from the presence of a serious malady. No other Byzantine medical texts provide such vivid descriptions of physician–patient interaction. Many fascinating details on the practice of medicine are scattered throughout the *On Urines*, but unfortunately this valuable text is not available in a modern critical edition. Julius Ideler's edition of 1842–1843 contains many errors and omissions. The text also has no introduction and no information as to which of the many surviving manuscripts served to establish the printed text.

SURGERY

In studying Byzantine medicine, scholars must venture beyond the circle of medical texts. Except for Zacharias' *On Urines*, such texts reveal little regarding how physicians organized their practice or where they met their patients. Moreover, medical texts after 700 never mention how surgical operations were conducted; even the otherwise loquacious Zacharias avoided surgical topics. Fortunately, non-medical sources have survived which supplement information found in medical texts. Passages from religious texts and narrative histories have been especially valuable in evaluating surgery after Paul of Aigina's *Pragmateia* and can shed light on the practice of dissecting human bodies.

As stated above, Leo's *Epitome* mentions surgery, but never describes how physicians operated beyond identifying particular instruments. A ninth-century hagiographical text, however, provides a description of an otherwise unknown procedure for removing kidney stones from the bladder. The *Life of Theophanes* by Nikephoros Skeuophylax recounts the trials which St. Theophanes endured in confronting the Iconoclastic policies of the emperor Leo V (813–820). Besides these sufferings, Theophanes was also plagued by kidney stones.

⁴³ Zacharias, *On Urines* 2.19 (pp. 50–51).

Theophanes was worn out with kidney problems and had difficulty urinating. Instruments were inserted into the bladder through the natural tubing for the urine (*urethra*). These instruments ground down the stone in the bladder; when these instruments were removed, they had made it possible for the stone to flow out with the urine without any hindrance.⁴⁴

Paul of Aigina had described an operation to remove a kidney stone by cutting through the *perinaion* and pushing the stone out through the incision. The *Life of Theophanes*, however, depicted a more sophisticated procedure called lithotripsy, not developed in western medicine until Jean Civiale performed it in post-revolution Paris (1823).⁴⁵ In addition to cutting for the stone, however, Paul of Aigina explained how to introduce a catheter tube into the bladder through the urethra. Paul designed this tube to remove urine from the bladder when a stone or a blood clot blocked the urine flow.⁴⁶ Some time after Paul had written his *Pragmateia*, Byzantine physicians apparently developed a very thin drill which they introduced into the bladder by using the catheter tube as a flange. In support of this argument, one should notice that the *Life of Theophanes* mentions more than one instrument introduced into Theophanes' bladder.⁴⁷

In his surgery book, the eleventh-century Arab physician 'Abbas al-Zahrawi (Albucasis) referred to a drill introduced through the urethral canal to grind kidney stones stuck in the canal itself, not in the bladder as described in the *Life of Theophanes*. Al-Zahrawi's description does not mention the catheter.⁴⁸ Describing his innovative lithotripsy operations in Paris, however, Civiale explained how he first inserted a straight catheter tube of silver into the bladder through the urethra. Using this catheter as a flange, Civiale introduced a tool to grasp the kidney stone and a small drill to grind it down. The ninth-century surgeons operating on Theophanes had apparently used a similar technique.⁴⁹

The tenth-century chronicler Symeon the Logothete recorded an even more remarkable surgery, performed soon before Constantine VII became sole ruler of the empire (945). Siamese twins from Armenia arrived in Constantinople, but shortly thereafter one of them died. In order to save the life of the surviving brother, skilled physicians decided to separate the living brother from his deceased twin. The two were joined at the stomach so that they faced each other. The physicians successfully separated the living twin, but he died three days later.⁵⁰ Despite this ultimate failure, that the living twin survived such an operation for three days demonstrates that

⁴⁴ Skeuophylax, *Life of Theophanes* 23. ⁴⁵ Miller 1997: 189; Civiale 1827: vi–xv.

⁴⁶ Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia* 6.59 (v. 2, 98). ⁴⁷ Skeuophylax, *Life of Theophanes* 23.

⁴⁸ Albucasis, *On Surgery and Instruments* 60 (p. 416). ⁴⁹ Civiale 1827: 60–65.

⁵⁰ Symeon the Logothete, *Chronicle* 136.82 (p. 339).

tenth-century surgeons in Constantinople understood human anatomy and had developed sophisticated surgical techniques.⁵¹ A few years later in 963, Arab physicians refused to attempt a similar operation on Siamese twins.⁵²

Although medical texts rarely mention how physicians operated on patients, sometimes the codices transmitting medical texts shed light on surgical interventions. Pursuing his codicological research, David Bennett found a marginal comment at the end of Codex Laurentianus 74.27, a fourteenth-century manuscript containing Paul of Aigina's *Pragmateia*. This note records in detail an operation to remove a large growth from an area between the skin and the intestines. The scribe-physician added that the surgeon had performed this operation in 1408.⁵³

DISSECTIONS

Medical historians have long known that most ancient Greek physicians did not perform autopsies on human cadavers.⁵⁴ In the sixteenth century, the renowned anatomist Vesalius finally realized that Galen himself had not dissected human bodies but had based his conclusions on examining animals.⁵⁵ Soon after the emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, however, attitudes toward dissecting human bodies changed. A late fourth-century Christian commentary on the Bible referred to physicians conducting autopsies on human corpses as beneficial activities.

The best doctors, because they are anxious to contrive something useful for our human nature, ask for those who have been condemned to death and dissect their bodies so that they can discover something useful for mankind through those brought to trial on a capital charge.⁵⁶

In his *History of the Wars*, the historian Prokopios described another kind of autopsy. In 542 an epidemic killed many in Constantinople. Historians have identified this illness as bubonic plague because Prokopios emphasized the presence of swollen buboes under the arms and in the groin area of victims.

Now some of the physicians . . . supposing that the disease was centered in the bubonic swellings, decided to investigate the bodies of the dead. Upon opening

⁵¹ See the detailed commentary on this operation by Pentagalos and Lascaratos 1984: 99–102.

⁵² From the *Chronicle of Dhahabi* (ms. de Gotha [Möler], no. 243, fol. 2^b). For this citation and a summary of the manuscript description, see Baudouin 1902: 546.

⁵³ Bennett 2003: 121–123 (text and commentary).

⁵⁴ Philips 1973: 139–141; Nutton 1995: 66; Annoni and Barras 1993: 185–227. ⁵⁵ Wear 1995: 275.

⁵⁶ Pseudo-Eustathios, *Commentarius in Exaemeron*, in *PG* 18:788. See Annoni and Barras 1993: 217 and n. 106.

some of the swellings, the physicians found a strange sort of carbuncle that had grown inside them.⁵⁷

The autopsies which Prokopios recorded differed from those mentioned in the fourth-century Bible commentary. In Prokopios' account, the physicians were not studying normal human anatomy, but were investigating how this deadly disease altered human tissue and organs. In fact, Prokopios was describing pathological anatomy.

Two texts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries also mention dissecting human cadavers. In an essay on asceticism (c. 1010), Symeon the New Theologian compared the efforts of a holy man to analyze the evil drives of the human soul to physicians exploring physical diseases: "[Physicians] dissect the dead to learn the plan of the body so that, learning from these operations what the inner workings of living patients are, they can attempt to cure the unseen diseases of others."⁵⁸ More than a hundred years later George Tornikes used a similar analogy to illustrate the perceptive powers of Anna Komnene, daughter of the emperor Alexios I (1081–1118). Tornikes compared Anna's intellectual acumen to

wise physicians who, with certain amazing and well-constructed instruments of their craft, dissect the bodies of men . . . and lay bare each part from its surrounding [tissue] to reveal its place, form, and composition, to learn what service it offers to the other parts and what services it receives from other parts, and in what manner, when this part is especially prospering regarding its functioning and composition, it enriches its neighbors, and, when the other parts suffer, it suffers the same thing with them or is completely destroyed.⁵⁹

Here Tornikes depicts a careful analysis of individual organs and how their proper functioning is affected by disease in nearby organs. A western source also mentions human dissections in Constantinople. William of Malmsbury recorded how in 1111 king Sigurt of Norway visited Constantinople where he and his men were briefly employed by the emperor Alexios as Varangian guards. While in Constantinople, Sigurt lost some of his men to a strange disease which the king blamed on excessive wine consumption. To prove his theory, Sigurt dissected several corpses and discovered that the unfortunate Vikings had damaged their livers. It is unlikely that Sigurt possessed "amazing and well-constructed instruments" for such autopsies. He probably asked Byzantine physicians to conduct the dissections.⁶⁰

Non-medical texts reveal Byzantine physicians conducting autopsies on human bodies, but medical texts strangely omit references to such

⁵⁷ Prokopios, *Wars* 2.22.29. ⁵⁸ Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse* 6 (v. 2, 138–141).

⁵⁹ Tornikes, *Funeral Oration for Anna Komnene* 225.

⁶⁰ William of Malmsbury, *Deeds of the English Kings* 5.410 (pp. 639–640); commentary by Hiestand 1989: 143–153.

dissections. Moreover, the anatomical text attributed to Theophilos implies that human dissections were never practiced. To learn the structure of the human shoulder, Theophilos recommends that a student,

should dissect, if possible, a monkey. If, however, no monkeys are available, he should dissect bears. If there are no bears, then let him dissect any animal, but he should always carry out dissections.⁶¹

Many passages in the anatomical studies of Meletios and Theophilos, however, derive from second-century sources. It is, therefore, possible that Theophilos' reference to animal dissections reflects medical science in second-century Alexandria rather than Constantinople after 700.

Although medical texts either ignore human dissections or even imply that such studies never occurred, one passage in Paul of Aigina's *Pragmateia* makes a short reference to them. In his introduction, Paul summarizes the goals of his compendium. Peter Pormann has translated this statement as follows:

The present work contains the diagnosis, etiology, and therapy of all diseases, whether they affect the homoeomerous parts, or the organs, or are seen when a continuity is dissolved, not only in a summary way, but with the necessary breadth.⁶²

Pormann's "homoeomerous parts" refers to systemic diseases while other illnesses are seated in particular organs, but what is the category of diseases which "are seen when a continuity is dissolved"? Francis Adams' translation, "or consisting of solutions of continuity," makes even less sense.⁶³ The introduction to Leo's *Synopsis* paraphrases Paul's statement by referring to only two types of diseases: the homoeomerous diseases causing imbalances in the humors and thus affecting the whole body and diseases affecting particular organs.⁶⁴ A careful rereading of Paul's text shows that he also had not mentioned a third category. His phrase, "which are seen when a continuity is dissolved," is not a third type of illness, but rather modifies the second category of diseases, those located in specific organs. In view of the fact that early Byzantine physicians had been conducting autopsies since the fourth century, and that Paul knew of such dissections, a better translation of this puzzling phrase would be, "diseases of the organs, which are visible in separation from their [anatomical] context." Such a translation fits perfectly what George Tornikes said about dissections: "[the physicians] lay bare each part from its surrounding [tissue]."⁶⁵

⁶¹ Theophilos, *Anatomy* 5.11 (p. 187). ⁶² Pormann 2004: 296. ⁶³ Adams 1844: v. 1, xviii.

⁶⁴ Leo Medicus, *Synopsis of Medicine* 1.1 (p. 89).

⁶⁵ Νοσημάτων . . . ὀργανικῶν, ἐν λύσει συνεχείας θεωρουμένων: Paul of Aigina, *Pragmateia*, pr. (v. 1, 4). Cf. Tornikes, *Funeral Oration for Anna Komnene* 225 line 15; [ἰατροὶ] ἕκαστον μέρος ἀπογυμνοῦσι τοῦ γείτονος.

As the fourth-century biblical commentary emphasized, human dissections benefited mankind because such autopsies helped to relieve the suffering of future patients. In other words, the Christian virtue of *philanthropia* (charity) justified the post-mortem dissections of human cadavers. Thus, Christian *philanthropia* removed the barriers to conducting autopsies on human bodies, but it also inspired bishops, monks, and lay Christians to establish new medical institutions called *xenones* or *nosokomeia* during the two centuries following the foundation of Constantinople, institutions that altered the medical profession in many ways.

HOSPITALS

Historians began to realize how hospitals influenced Byzantine medicine in 1895 when Alexei Dmitrievsky first published the *Pantokrator Typikon*, regulations for a Constantinopolitan monastery established in 1136 by the emperor John II.⁶⁶ Besides regulating the monks' daily lives, the *Typikon* (or Rule) provided instructions for establishing a medical hospital and an old-age home which the Pantokrator monastery was to maintain.⁶⁷ Since the publication of these regulations, historians have expressed amazement at the level of medical care which the Pantokrator hospital provided to its patients. Some commentators have even denied that such an institution ever existed and have dismissed the regulations as an unobtainable ideal.⁶⁸ According to the *Typikon*, the hospital maintained five wards of ten to twelve patients each. Two physicians, five medical assistants (*hypourgoi*), two servants (*hyperetai*), and an undetermined number of medical students attended each ward. The two physicians supervising each ward alternated every other month in treating hospital patients. During their off-duty months, the physicians visited private patients.⁶⁹

No one now disputes that hospitals influenced the development of Byzantine medicine. Scholars, however, have debated how much such institutions shaped medical practice because professional texts rarely mention them. As with surgery and dissections, hospitals never came to the attention of medical historians until non-medical sources such as the *Pantokrator Typikon* were closely examined. We now know that new philanthropic institutions appeared during the fourth century as Christianity assumed a greater role in both cities and the imperial government. First orphanages and leprosaria opened, then hospitals for patients with curable diseases. By the early fifth century, hospitals were common

⁶⁶ For the history of the *Pantokrator Typikon* and the edition by Alexei Dmitrievsky, see the introduction to Gautier's edition, 5.

⁶⁷ *Pantokrator Typikon* 82–111. ⁶⁸ Hunger 1965: 180; Kislinger 1987: 173–179.

⁶⁹ See the commentary in Miller 1997: 14–19.

enough in the Greek provinces that the monk Neilos of Ankyra could use such institutions as a metaphor for Christ's care of sinners:

Many are the sick in the hospital (*nosokomeion*) of this present age. The same medicine does not fit them all, nor is the same diet right for all. The physician assigns the medicines and diet appropriate to each patient, just as Christ can heal each sinner.⁷⁰

Sixth-century sources from Constantinople and Egypt show that city physicians (*archiatroi*) were now treating patients in Christian hospitals.⁷¹ Two seventh-century sources describing the Sampson and Christodotes hospitals in Constantinople reveal organizational features found later in the *Pantokrator Typikon*. The Sampson hospital had an operating room and special facilities for eye patients, and the Christodotes had a staff of physicians (*archiatroi*), medical assistants (*hypourgoi*), and servants (*hyperetai*) for patients, the same staff positions found in the *Pantokrator Typikon*. Moreover, physicians at the seventh-century Christodotes worked in monthly shifts just like physicians at the Pantokrator hospital.⁷² By the ninth century, Constantinople's leading physicians were organized around the city's hospitals, appearing in imperial ceremonies with *xenon* directors.⁷³ By the twelfth century, if not before, hospitals were training medical students.

The Pantokrator *xenon* hired a physician to instruct students in the science of medicine, i.e. to explain the key medical texts of antiquity and the better Byzantine writers.⁷⁴ Moreover, the *Typikon* refers to unsalaried physicians at the hospital identified as *perissoi* (extras). They apparently worked for free at the hospital by the side of the paid physicians. When salaried posts opened up at the lowest grade in the system, these vacancies were filled by candidates from among these "extra" physicians.⁷⁵ Another twelfth-century source, identified as Poem 59 in a collection of poetry attributed to the anonymous Mangana author, presents a different perspective on the Pantokrator teaching program.⁷⁶ The poem describes three physicians visiting Eirene, sister-in-law of emperor Manuel I (1143–1180),

⁷⁰ Neilos of Ankyra, *Letter* 110 (col. 248).

⁷¹ For *archiatroi* associated with hospitals in Egypt, see Serfass 2008: 99 and n. 55; for *archiatroi* at the Sampson hospital at the end of the sixth century, see Anastasios of Sinai, *Oration on Psalm 6*, cols. 112–113. See also Miller 1997: xxi–xxiii.

⁷² For the Sampson *xenon*, see *Miracles of St. Artemios*, mir. 21 (pp. 124–131); for the Christodotes *xenon*, see *ibid.* mir. 22 (pp. 130–137).

⁷³ Philotheos, *Kletorologion* 183.

⁷⁴ *Pantokrator Typikon* 107, lines 1313–1323: διδάσκειν τὰ τῆς ἰατρικῆς ἐπιστήμης.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 93, lines 1063–1073.

⁷⁶ For the Mangana Poet, see Magdalino 1993a: 440–442. The manuscript title of *Poem* 59 is given by *ibid.* 497 as: "A speech representing the suffering of the *sebastokratorissa* and the illness with which she was afflicted, when she was staying in the monastery of the Pantokrator."

in her hospital bed at the Pantokrator. Two students who accompanied a senior physician are described in the following verses:

Both are good and skilled healers of diseases,
practical and theoretical students of the science.
They use science to complete what is lacking in their practical experience.⁷⁷

The poem continues by praising the students and ridiculing the pompous senior physician.

This poem depicts student physicians (the *perissoi* physicians of the *Pantokrator Typikon*) accompanying the ward physician on his daily rounds so that they can complete the practical segment of their education. In a nearly contemporary document, the patriarch Leo Stypes (1134–1143) compared the training of Christian clergy, physicians of the soul, to that of physicians of the body. The patriarch stated that medical students first studied the works of Galen and Hippocrates (*logoi*) and then were trained in the practical aspects of the art (*peira*).⁷⁸ David Bennett also uncovered a teaching program at the Mangana *xenon* in Constantinople. In a fourteenth-century manuscript (Vat. Gr. 299), he identified fourteen entries in a collection of medical recipes, entries attributed to physicians and students of the Mangana.⁷⁹ The last of the Mangana entries begins: “For inflammation of the hand after phlebotomy, as we were taught from the *xenon*.” There follows a detailed set of instructions regarding how to prepare compresses for the wound, when to change these, and how to handle complications.⁸⁰ As these notes never mention Galen or another medical author, they were probably taken during the training in practical medicine. Moreover, they treat the subject of wound compresses in a far more thorough way than post-700 medical treatises such as Theophanes’ *Epitome*. These student notes support the suggestion that Byzantine medical wisdom, including specific instructions on conducting surgical operations, was communicated orally in lectures and in hospital rounds.⁸¹

The Krales *xenon*, founded in Constantinople by the Serbian ruler Uroš II Milutin (1281–1321), also supported a teaching program. An illustration in an Oxford manuscript (Barocci 83, fol. 34^v) shows John Argyropoulos (fifteenth century) lecturing from a lofty chair, with the Krales *xenon* dome in the background. The accompanying inscription lists Argyropoulos’ Greek and Italian students.⁸² In 2000, Brigitte Mondrain published an

⁷⁷ *Poem* 59, lines 164–166: ἄμφω καλοὶ καὶ τεχνικοὶ θεραπευταὶ τῶν νόσων / καὶ πρακτικοὶ καὶ λογικοὶ τὸν λόγον ἐρευνῶντες / καὶ τὸ τῆς πείρας ἀτελεῖς τῷ λόγῳ συμπληροῦντες.

⁷⁸ Text and commentary in Grumel 1949: 42–46.

⁷⁹ For a list of the Mangana *xenon* passages and their folio numbers in Vat. Gr. 299, see Bennett 2003: 179–180.

⁸⁰ For the text of these lecture notes, see *ibid.* 110–111.

⁸¹ Miller 1997: 181–182; Zipser 2005: 113–114; Hohlweg 1984: 123–124. ⁸² Miller 1997: 206.

article identifying another manuscript with a note about Argyropoulos' teaching. In Marc. Gr. V.9 (fol. 73v), Mondrain discovered a diagram with the inscription: "Diagram of John Argyropoulos, the philosopher and teacher, when we were taught by him in the Krales *xenon* the work of Galen *On the Art*." Here Argyropoulos was explaining Galen's *Ars medica*, i.e. teaching the *logoi* of medical science at the *xenon* (the first stage of instruction, according to the patriarch Stypes' metaphor).⁸³ Mondrain not only provides additional evidence of teaching at the Krales *xenon*, she demonstrates that this institution supported a program of copying medical, philosophical, and literary texts. She suspects that the Krales hospital library formed the core of an extensive collection of Greek manuscripts that was seen later on Corfu by Janis Laskaris in 1491, while searching for Greek codices on behalf of Lorenzo de Medici, forty years after the fall of Constantinople.⁸⁴

Besides employing physicians, Byzantine hospitals also hired pharmacists. According to its *Typikon*, the Pantokrator hospital paid six pharmacists: a chief pharmacist and five assistants. The *Typikon* called these professionals *pimentarioi*, a word derived from Latin. Presumably these men prepared the medicines which physicians prescribed for patients in the wards as well as pharmaceuticals for people who came to the hospital's walk-in clinic. The *Typikon*, however, does not describe what the pharmacists were required to do.⁸⁵ The twelfth-century historian John Kinnamos provides additional information on hospital pharmacies, if not on pharmacists. To prove that the emperor Manuel I had mastered medical science, Kinnamos mentions that he personally treated patients and had developed new salves and potable medicines "which anyone who wished could select for himself in the public hospitals which are usually called *xenones*."⁸⁶ Kinnamos assumes that Constantinopolitans could obtain Manuel's new drugs in the city's public hospitals. A hospital in Thessalonike apparently played a similar role in that city. In describing the sack of the city in 1185, archbishop Eustathios accused the Normans of destroying the city's hospital, and as a result those who needed medicine were forced to go elsewhere.⁸⁷

Firmer evidence of the role hospitals played in providing medicines has recently come to light. Among the later scholia to the *Basilika*, the tenth-century reorganization of Justinian's corpus, appear two definitions of *pimentarios*, the term for pharmacist used in the *Typikon*.

(60.39.3.7) *Pimentarioi* are those who are dedicated to collecting herbs and storing them in the *xenon*; they are the ones who are the caretakers of the medicines.

⁸³ Mondrain 2000a: 227–230. ⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 231.

⁸⁵ *Pantokrator Typikon* 89, lines 996–998; 101, lines 1205–1209 and 1216–1218.

⁸⁶ Kinnamos, *History* 4.21 (p. 190). ⁸⁷ Eustathios, *The Capture of Thessalonike* 146.

(60.39.3.12) The *pimentarios* is a person in the hospitals (*nosokomeia*) who is entrusted with overseeing and guarding the medicines, or he is an artisan who sells medicines or the scented herbs used for medicines.⁸⁸

Both of these definitions assume that many, if not most, pharmacists served in hospitals, although the second definition also mentions druggists in commercial shops. Since these two definitions appear together with legal opinions of the emperors Constantine X (1059–1067) and Alexios I (1081–1118), they too probably date to the late eleventh century.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

Byzantine medical achievements are difficult to evaluate, primarily because of the limited information in post-700 medical treatises. Evidence from non-medical texts reveals a profession functioning within sophisticated hospitals where medical students were trained in the principal texts of the profession and then supervised as they participated in hospital rounds. Moreover, physicians conducted autopsies on human cadavers, not simply to learn anatomy, but also to trace the course of diseases within the recesses of the human body. On the other hand, hospitals, autopsies, and even surgical operations have left few traces in the terse medical texts composed after 700. Palaeographers are uncovering more information from manuscript marginalia and from a few detailed accounts buried in long, repetitive *iatrosophia*, but progress has been slow, and fewer young scholars are prepared to carry out the necessary palaeographical and codicological research.

Another possible avenue of research might come from exploring the impact of Greek physicians in Renaissance Italy. Mondrain has demonstrated the role of the Krales *xenon* in transmitting manuscripts from Constantinople to the west. What other connections existed? In 1507, in the Florentine hospital of Santa Maria Nova, Leonardo da Vinci conducted an autopsy on an old man to discover the cause of his “happy death.” Was Leonardo simply following an Italian tradition of dissections begun in the late Middle Ages, or had he learned something about pathological anatomy from Greek émigrés or their Italian students?⁹⁰ In 1478, da Vinci compiled a list of eight scholars and artists whom he had either met or desired to meet; one of these was John Argyropoulos, the physician who had practiced and taught medicine in Constantinople prior to 1453.⁹¹

⁸⁸ [Basilika] *Scholia in librum LX*, 17–69, 40.39.3.7 and 12 (p. 3748). These references are from Bennett 2003: 107–108.

⁸⁹ Miller 2013: 212 and n. 38.

⁹⁰ Biaggi 1956: 406. See Azzolini 2006: 163 for the accepted date of this dissection.

⁹¹ Nicholl 2004: 148–149.

PART IV
PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN MIDDLE
BYZANTIUM

CHAPTER 16

PHILOSOPHY AND “BYZANTINE PHILOSOPHY”

DIMITRI GUTAS AND NIKETAS SINOSSOGLOU

“BYZANTINE PHILOSOPHY”?

Most people instinctively assume that philosophy is a lofty and valuable thing, which partly explains the favorable reception accorded to the relatively novel scholarly term “Byzantine philosophy.” It is a plausible assumption that if ancients and moderns philosophized, then the people we call Byzantines also philosophized in their own Byzantine way, and the output of that intellectual activity should, unsurprisingly, be called Byzantine philosophy. In an age that allows for various metonymical, loose, and metaphorical usages of the term “philosophy” and asks for all Enlightenment prejudices against Byzantium to be dropped, the coinage “Byzantine philosophy” appears legitimate and defensible.

The claim for a distinctly Byzantine branch in the history of philosophy appears reasonable, but its history is new.¹ In post-Enlightenment Eurocentric modernity, philosophy as such was “naturally” associated with that of the Hellenes,² the medieval schoolmen, and the moderns, e.g. Descartes and Hobbes. By the mid-nineteenth century, and especially with the work of Ernest Renan, it became difficult not to acknowledge, however grudgingly, that the Arabs also had philosophy, be it only as transmitters, and in light of the overwhelming influence of Averroes on the schoolmen. At the same time (also by the end of the nineteenth century), the same had to be done for the Jews, both those living within the Islamic world who wrote in Arabic and those in southern France and northern Italy who worked with Hebrew translations of the Arabic sources and equally submitted to the influence of Averroes. And now, claiming a place among other ethnic/religious/linguistic communities, the Byzantines have also

¹ The term came to prominence with the work of Tatakis 1969, who seems to have intended it as more or less intrinsically connected to the equally debatable term “Patristic philosophy,” i.e. Christian philosophy.

² The terms Hellenes, Hellenic, and Hellenism will here follow Byzantine usage in referring to the ancient Greeks and their culture, religion, and civilization, to distinguish them from the Roman Orthodox (Byzantines). The term “Greek” is equivocal, insofar as the Byzantines used the Greek language, and linguistic affinity is often rhetorically exploited to paste over differences or imply continuities as the (usually unquestioned) default position.

been discovered to have had philosophy. But it is possible that this has come about through the legerdemain of subjecting historical fact to a Procrustean bed of politically correct specifications.³

Beyond mere scholarly political correctness, there is a fundamental question that recent scholarship tends to avoid: would the term “Byzantine philosophy” be meaningful to the Byzantines themselves, and would it be at all acceptable to them? Put otherwise: Is “Byzantine philosophy” a historically valid category, that is, one that the agents commonly regarded as its major representatives, such as the great Orthodox theologians John of Damascus, Maximos the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas, would find applicable to what they were doing intellectually, especially if they were told that they were thereby engaged in the same enterprise as, say, John Italos, condemned as a heretic in the addenda to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*? And *vice versa*: would self-styled “true” philosophers such as Psellos and Italos approve of their reclassification among false philosophers whom they mocked, or those “teachers who sit with smug faces and long beards, looking pale and grim, with a frown, shabbily dressed,” i.e. probably monks?⁴

The following analysis will not rest on any exclusive, specific, and trans-historical definition of philosophy. There may be several views about what that is, what it should be or do on this or that basis, or absolutely, but ours is a historical study and we are interested in what the Byzantines thought about “philosophy” as apprehended in their particular context, and whether recent conceptualizations of an intrinsically “Byzantine philosophy” would be acceptable or meaningful to them. Though we are careful not to commit ourselves to an objectivist view of philosophy, we are equally wary of the anachronistic uses of the word *philosophia* that are now widely observable: its valorized Byzantine meanings have been “liquidated” and reinvested in relativist modern approaches. As we believe that modern scholars rely on relativist arguments to maintain the ostensibly distinct field of “Byzantine philosophy,” we shall show that these “specialists in Byzantine philosophy” invariably confuse ancient, Byzantine, and modern approaches to philosophy; and they only rarely note that the Byzantines themselves used the word according to standards and priorities very different to those employed by the Hellenes and of course by the moderns too. Contrariwise, we wish to take the bull by the horns and approach

³ See, for example, the unsubstantiated claim by Mavroudi 2015: 37: “Around the year 800 we have evidence of philosophical activity in Latin, Greek, and Arabic,” with Hebrew thrown in for good measure in the next sentence. There is no specification of what “philosophical activity” means (Would copying or buying a philosophical manuscript count? Would shelving it?), and there is no concern to come to grips with the question of what it means to philosophize in these four linguistic contexts.

⁴ Psellos, *Chronographia* 3.3 (Virgin birth), 6A.18, and in many places; and *Oratoria minora* 19.35–55 (beards).

philosophy in Byzantium using neither objectivist nor relativist definitions of what philosophy is, but rather a historical one. Put otherwise: Will the real Byzantine view of philosophy please stand up?

On the face of it, the topic is currently in a confused state. For their part, Byzantine texts alternate between one *negative* and two *positive* usages of *philosophia*. These are: (a) the explicit condemnation of ancient philosophy as a viable option in itself for construing a person's or a society's worldview – any claim that ancient cosmology, epistemology, and ontology could compete with the revealed doctrines of Orthodoxy in regard to truthfulness or even in their very epistemic standards was a priori excluded, and condemned as immoral; and (b) the occasional recalibration of the linguistic sign *philosophia* (which was prestigious and weighty) to "enhance" other significations and needs – true *philosophia*, it was repeatedly claimed, corresponded to ascetical and mystical versions of the Orthodox worldview that were irreconcilable with and opposed to the intellectualism of ancient *philosophia*; and (c) the teaching of and commenting on selected parts of Aristotelian and Platonic texts, in order to either complement the curricular training of the secular elite and clergy in logic and rhetoric, or enhance the conceptual arsenal of Orthodox theological discourse. Yet at no point in the Byzantine era did (b), namely the novel Christian metonymical uses of *philosophia*, ever overcome or fully displace the anxiety represented by (a), namely the idea that Hellenic philosophy ultimately represented a dangerous antagonist. The Byzantine intellectual outlook was shaped by – and also continued – a centuries-long tradition of Judeo-Christian revealed truth which claimed the name *philosophia* in order to describe a worldview that was felt to be profoundly different from the worldview(s) of the Hellenic philosophical tradition. Nor did (c) ever imply that non-Orthodox ideas about the natural world, knowledge, or history could openly claim their right to truthfulness or compete in the intellectual arena with (b) and Orthodox theology. Rather, from the Cappadocians to the fourteenth-century *Synodal Tomes* and Gennadios Scholarios, the spread of ascetical and mystical applications of the word *philosophia* never fully resulted in the final retirement of Hellenic philosophy. The tension persisted despite all attempts at appropriation.

All major Byzantine theologians now commonly included in accounts of Byzantine philosophy, from John of Damascus to Gregory Palamas, were anxious to maintain a clear distinction between their Roman Orthodox identity and their instrumental or encyclopedic engagement with "Hellenic" sources, also called *thyrathen* (outside the bounds of Christianity). The latter appellation indicated by itself how alien they considered the actual ideas contained in those texts that we now consider to be the primary sources of their "philosophy." From their point of view, Orthodoxy provided a set of unnegotiable premises and an inviolable existential orientation and outlook on life, anchored in the Bible and

Christocentric revelation, which addressed all the major questions of metaphysics and human existence. Hellenic philosophy was hardly ever deemed to provide independent, alternative, and competing answers to those same questions. In sum, Orthodoxy in Byzantium was primarily a mode of existence, a way of being that had intellectual correlates; the study of secular philosophy was not on the same level. It was, rather, an ancillary scholarly pursuit that sometimes reinforced those intellectual correlates of Orthodoxy but was roundly condemned when it did not, which was often.

Therefore, Byzantine theologians and mystics would likely not rejoice in their recategorization as “philosophers.” They did not believe that they were continuing the Hellenic philosophical tradition. As for those erudite teachers, clerics, or civil functionaries who indeed taught or commented on Plato and Aristotle, they were not eager to clash with Orthodox collective opinion and clerical hegemony by openly claiming the right of philosophical discourse to freely compete on the epistemic level with theology, asceticism, and the mystical tradition. Some even tried hard to deflect the suspicion that they were taking the contents of Hellenic philosophical texts seriously.⁵ Therefore, it is a question that needs to be posed whether such reserved and circumscribed intellectual activity, as was the Byzantine selective teaching of logic and metaphysics, qualifies as “philosophy,” and if so, what exactly is meant by the word.

It is at this point that recent attempts to construe a distinct field of “Byzantine philosophy” provide a reply that is in urgent need of scrutiny. They commonly assume a relativist and tautological approach according to which “philosophy is, ultimately, whatever philosophers think it is,”⁶ or that anyone who claims to be doing philosophy is a philosopher, regardless of what he is actually doing.⁷ This circular approach allows modern researchers to conjure up a field of Byzantine philosophy out of material that might not otherwise be suitable, on the basis of the mere presence of the words *philosophia* and *philosophos*. But to think or say that something is *philosophy* is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for anyone else to consider it as such. As Plato puts it in *Republic* 500b, “not everyone called ‘a philosopher’ is really a philosopher.” Byzantine mystics, ascetics, and theologians would readily agree with Plato: from where they stood, Orthodox *philosophia* was fundamentally different and superior to the “sterile reasoning” of Hellenic philosophy. At any rate, it was a different kind of thing with different epistemological principles. Hence, the metonymical shifts of the word *philosophia* in Byzantium carried a self-confessed and deeply lived tension with ancient philosophy. But the blithe modern

⁵ See below for Michael Psellos; cf. Kaldellis 2012. ⁶ Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012b: 29.

⁷ Trizio 2007: 288, 291–292.

umbrella term “Byzantine philosophy” does not account for those strained conceptions of *philosophia* found in the writers we are studying, and thereby deploys a modern relativistic definition (an etic one) to override their own self-understanding (an emic one). In these cases, we are literally *imposing* an unqualified idea of philosophy on the Byzantines.

To be sure, neither the ancients nor the Christians ever devised an exclusive definition of philosophy. The polysemy of the word might then allow us to retrospectively classify as philosophers authors who did not then and still do not now sit well within the philosophical tradition from the Greeks to the Arabs and the moderns, e.g. Basil of Caesarea or Gregory of Nazianzos. For example, Jonathan Barnes notes that “Christianity was not, and was not taken to be, a philosophy . . . there is no specifically Christian sense of the word [φιλόσοφος / *philosophos*] . . . no Christian text suggests that it has a Christian sense. The modern discovery of the Christian sense . . . depends on bad lexicography.”⁸ This observation refutes those who, like Tatakis, thought of Byzantine philosophy as an essentially Christian philosophy; but it helps those who argue that “Byzantine philosophy” is a legitimate term, insofar as the word *philosophy* remains undefined and irreducible and therefore available for widespread use. If ancients disagreed on what philosophy is, then we too may, on our own authority, recategorize as “philosophical” various Christian apologetical, theological, or rhetorical types of discourse. The argument, however, collapses *ad absurdum*, for it then becomes equally applicable to all sorts of medieval, modern, or contemporary forms of discourse, from theology to astrology.⁹ If philosophy is indeterminate, then everything can potentially qualify as philosophy. But ultimately the main problem with this relativist approach is that it contradicts Byzantine understandings of Orthodoxy that specifically excluded “Hellenic” philosophical ideas relevant to cosmology, history, metaphysics, epistemology, or even moral and political philosophy.¹⁰ The Byzantines were clear that their positive application of the word *philosophia* differed dramatically from ancient associations of the word, so strictly speaking their use of it was a case of equivocity and metonymy. To classify both Roman Orthodox and Hellenic understandings of *philosophia* under the indifferent label *philosophy* requires us to

⁸ Barnes 2002a: 298.

⁹ This is reflected in the difficulty that adherents of the existence of a Byzantine philosophy have had in identifying and defining their object. See the survey of various attempts by Trizio 2007, and, most tellingly, the shift in the titles of Ierodiakonou’s collections, from *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (2002) to *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy* (2012). Interestingly, no corresponding difficulty exists in the case of ancient Greek and medieval Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew philosophy: Gutas 2015: 346 n. 34.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Platonic positions rejected by Byzantine intellectuals see Siniosoglou (forthcoming b).

anachronistically empty that label of any particular meaning, simply in order to create room for all.

PHILOSOPHY IN BYZANTIUM: HISTORICAL
AND META-PHILOSOPHICAL CRITERIA

In order to regain analytical rigor, the field requires both a historical and a meta-philosophical criterion that would be able not only to distinguish among equivocal applications of the word *philosophia*, but also to identify philosophical acumen in those contexts from which the word philosophy may, indeed, be absent. If not everyone called “a philosopher” was a philosopher, as Plato put it, it may well be that someone not explicitly defined or self-defined as “a philosopher” was. But where to turn for such a criterion?

As already implied, the *historical* criterion is provided by Hellenic philosophy, especially as it is claimed that “Byzantine philosophy” has its sources in, derives from, or is a continuation of Hellenic philosophy.¹¹ From a Byzantine as well as a modern perspective, philosophy west of India is Hellenic, *tout court*: the Hellenes discovered or invented it, developed it, maintained a critical stance toward its own assumptions, and practiced it. As a rule, it consisted of three main elements. Philosophy was (a) an open-ended and critical inquiry into, and analysis of, competing ideas about reality and the physical world; (b) an investigation and explanation of first principles and causes; and (c) an incessant discussion and reevaluation of the methods used in the inquiry. Philosophy was, at this basic level, “scientific” even as we understand the term today, and even if the modern category of science does not overlap exactly with the modes of ancient philosophy.

Philosophy covered a wide variety of fields – indeed, all aspects of perceived reality – including many subjects that we would consider “scientific” today, such as mathematics and biology. Already Aristotle established the classification of the different parts of philosophy in *Metaphysics* E.1 and K.7, according to which philosophy has a practical, productive, and theoretical part, the last one of which includes physics (the natural and life sciences), mathematics (of which Aristotle mentions in E.1 geometry and astronomy, but which included arithmetic and music), and metaphysics. The practical part was understood to cover ethics, economics, and politics, and the productive part rhetoric and poetics, two subjects which by late antiquity were rolled over into logic to form the *Organon*, or instrument of philosophy. It is thus clear that for antiquity it makes no sense to talk about “philosophy” and “science” as if they were different inquiries or studies of reality. Philosophy was science and science was philosophy.

¹¹ E.g. in Ierodiakonou 2002a.

This was, *grosso modo*, the understanding and classification of philosophy that were transmitted into Arabic and Latin in the Middle Ages, and via Arabic also into Hebrew. All this has been intensively studied, analyzed, and established beyond doubt,¹² and it must also form the backdrop and criterion in any discussion of an alleged *Byzantine* philosophy.

Beyond the historical understanding of philosophy described above, we may also apply a meta-philosophical criterion that is common in both the ancient and the modern intellectual contexts. It can be stated that philosophical discourse aims at arriving at a mutual understanding or rational consensus among interlocutors through an open-ended process, that is, without the interference of externally imposed restrictions. For example, philosophical discourse may cast doubts upon its own premises and conceptual sources, or examine them critically; or it may examine the validity of opposed arguments from diverse perspectives, while respecting those who set them out. This, however, does not sit well with "orthodoxy," however defined. Political, institutional, or religious adherence to an ideological construct presented as the absolute and unnegotiable truth, and its imposition by political institutions, severely compromises the ability of philosophy to freely arrive at agreement by means of discursive reason, as well as its ability to examine its own principles. In other words, they compromise the ability of philosophy to *exist*. So there are two issues at stake: (a) objective restrictions imposed by the historical, social, and institutional context; and (b) the alleged philosophers' own epistemological commitments. Both cooperate to produce historically observable instances of begging the question (*petitio principii*): predecided conclusions to which all argumentation must arrive, no matter the route.

So how far did any strands of the intellectual activity now classified as "Byzantine philosophy" allow for autonomous and unrestricted reflection (both institutionally and epistemologically) and/or the critical examination of its own (mostly theological) principles? The question is not how far the Byzantines philosophized. The question is how far they were *allowed* to philosophize and how far they allowed *others* to philosophize.

On this understanding, what is claimed to be "Byzantine philosophy" meets none of the three criteria of Hellenic philosophy listed above, and it

¹² The development, progress, nature, and essential characteristics of Hellenic philosophy and science have been repeatedly studied in the last century, and perhaps most comprehensively and cautiously, and in extensive and salutary detail, by G.E.R. Lloyd; see in particular Lloyd 1979 and 1983. His studies are especially valuable in that they investigate not only what we can establish the Hellenes did in science, but particularly what they themselves thought they were doing; see, for example, his *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (1987), with the significant subtitle *Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science*. A general presentation of the consensus position on who the Hellenic philosopher was and what he did is found in Frede 2003: 1–17. For the transmission of the Hellenic (scientific-philosophical) worldview and approach to reality, along with the requisite texts in translation into various languages, see Gutas 2015: 326–350.

also fails to meet the meta-philosophical criterion of open-ended discourse. Accordingly, the Byzantines had no philosophy (or very little of it, in the margins). The reason is not far to see. To do philosophy in Byzantium, on our definition, the Byzantines would not have to fully commit themselves to the validity of Hellenic philosophical doctrines; but they still would have to be able to entertain the possibility, and be able to argue for it, that some Hellenic theories were more true than Orthodox doctrine, and that the rest was open to investigation; or that neither was true compared to a third, new alternative proposed with the requisite philosophical rigor. But this occurred only exceptionally, if at all, and then only by means of subterfuge and dissimulation. As a rule, the religious orthodoxy forged by the Fathers of the Church and legislated into practice by both the Church Councils and imperial laws left no room for intellectual deviation from the sole prescribed *doxa*, that is, the *orthodoxa*. Technical discussions of Aristotelian and Platonic terms were indeed welcome, but they were a priori mitigated in order to avoid challenging or competing with the revealed truth of Orthodoxy.

We may note here that religion as such, any religion, is not by itself inimical to philosophy; but certain forms of the institutionalization of religion adopted and enforced by historical societies may well be. All societies in the lands west of India have had religions in historical times, even the Hellenes, and yet science and philosophy flourished in a number of them. There is a scale of adherence to the mythological narrative or doctrines of a religion, from none to total, that is the discriminating factor in this case. If no adherence at all at one end of the scale would be atheism, the historical minimum might be that of the Epicureans, who made gods responsible for the universe but then abstain completely from running it. Around the middle of the scale would be the majority of medieval philosophers, including the early Muslim philosophers. While adhering to and even believing in the mythological narrative of their respective religions, they nevertheless found ways to accommodate it to philosophical truth, usually by allegorizing it and making it express symbolically the conclusions of philosophy.¹³ With few exceptions, the Byzantines placed themselves at the other extreme, the literalist and unnegotiable total adherence

¹³ The comparison of Arabic philosophy with the Byzantine attitude to philosophy is instructive in highlighting the essential differences; see Gutas (forthcoming). The standard position of philosophers from al-Fārābī (d. 950) to Averroes (d. 1198) was that the truth is expressed in the demonstrative language of the philosophers and in their doctrines based on syllogistic verification; the masses, unable to understand this language due to mental incapacity, are given the same truth symbolically, in images and myths, as presented in the revealed books. The mythological narrative of a religion is thus to be interpreted in terms of philosophy, and not the other way around, as was the case with the Byzantine thinkers. For the Neoplatonists, see Siniosoglou 2010c. For the position of Avicenna (d. 1037), in particular, who went to great lengths to analyze the mechanics of revelation and explicate it on the basis of natural science (physics), see Gutas 2014: 337–343.

to the mythological narrative. In Byzantium, Orthodoxy reserved the absolute claim to truth, insofar as revealed and sacrosanct truths were a priori deemed superior to one or other of the rival Hellenic philosophical truth-claims, and it explicitly excluded all rivals and even “philosophical” interpretations of itself. Thus, the possibility of arriving at a mutually acceptable agreement through discursive argument was recognized only within a predetermined Orthodox framework. Even then, coming to an understanding was a potentially risky business: theology itself was at times even more dangerous than philosophy, as can be inferred from the adventures of Byzantine heretical theologians.¹⁴

There are numerous reasons why the vast majority of the ruling classes, clergy, and intellectuals found it necessary to adopt this position for so long, which Byzantine social history might at some point clarify. One major factor, however, and the preponderant one, surely, is the fact that because Greek-speaking Orthodox Christianity in the eastern half of the Roman empire developed within a Greek-speaking Hellenic population, it had to define itself for its very essence as the correction, transformation, or simply *negation* of Hellenism as a worldview. In the zero-sum game that ensued in the centuries from late antiquity onwards, any concession to Hellenism was inevitably taken to mean a possible diminution of the essence of Orthodoxy. Thus, at the intellectual level, all aspects of Hellenism as a worldview had to be fought to the bitter end, and certainly so was philosophy, the very embodiment of Hellenism.

This kind of “internecine” struggle was unique to Byzantium and presented a problem that none of the other nations that embraced Hellenic philosophy had to contend with to this extreme extent, not the Syriac-speakers, Persians, Arabs, Latins, or Jews of Europe.¹⁵ And it goes a long way toward explaining the different fate of philosophy among all these other nations on the one hand and in Byzantium on the other. Within this general context, we can trace in greater detail the specifics of the contest as it developed over time.

FROM HELLENIC PHILOSOPHY TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Late antique apologists and Byzantine intellectuals did not expect, did not undertake, or were not allowed by the dominant culture to rely on discursive reason *alone* for providing a coherent and self-sufficient

¹⁴ See Chapter 27.

¹⁵ Just a brief example, among the hundreds that can be given, of the attitude of a member of one of these nations, is the conclusion of a prayer by the very devout East Syriac Christian, Elia, who wrote in the ninth/tenth century: “May we peacefully reach the haven of the supernal Athens, that city of the heavenly philosophers”; cited by Brock 2015: 119. It is hard to imagine an Orthodox Byzantine openly concluding his prayer with such words. Cf. Gutas 2015.

worldview as an alternative to Orthodoxy. Put otherwise, they were neither expected nor allowed to challenge the *orthē doxa*, or Orthodox confession and its non-philosophical sources. Their recourse to philosophical argumentation was restricted and ancillary, as well as subservient to either theological or mystical discourse, which for them constituted, in advance of any “philosophical” investigation, the genuine or “true philosophy.” Already at the very beginning of the formation of the Orthodox intellectual tradition, Origen gave explicit instructions on how to use Hellenic philosophy in his letter to his former student (and later a bishop) Gregory Thaumaturgos:

I wish to ask you *to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks* what may serve as a course of study or a *preparation for Christianity* . . . Something of this kind is foreshadowed in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbors . . . vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by despoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for *the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God*.¹⁶

In the fourth century, the three Cappadocians privileged the same tactic of selectively, and often (dis)ingenuously, appropriating, decontextualizing, and redeploying words from ancient sources to serve the intellectual and moral needs of their revealed religion. They did not claim to be doing philosophy, and we should not see their instrumental approach to Hellenic texts as a philosophical project either, to the extent that it neither was nor was meant to be one. This explains why the internal coherence of key Platonic and Aristotelian ideas was rendered obsolete, especially in ontology and cosmology. Throughout Byzantine intellectual history, theologians and intellectuals conformed to this practice with only limited deviations. It is impossible to appreciate philosophy in Byzantium without taking account of this major change in hermeneutical priorities that occurred in late antiquity.

Christians and Hellenes conceptualized Christianity and Hellenism as rival modes of thinking about man, god, the world, and history that were at opposite conceptual poles. Accordingly, whereas Hellenes and Christians at the outset may appear equally likely to have read Plato and Aristotle (both in more or less dubious ways), in reality their actual strategies of interpretation were incomparable. The reason is, first, that the Christian reconfiguration of ancient vocabulary depended upon a novel criterion that was external to the intrinsic cohesion of Plato’s or Aristotle’s text and irrelevant to the original question of Platonic or Aristotelian exegesis, that is, what Plato or Aristotle really meant. That novel criterion was the appeal to extra-textual (scriptural, dogmatic, or ecclesiastical) authority.

¹⁶ Origen, *Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgos* 393 (tr. modified).

Successful interpretation was measured according to the achieved degree of conformity between each interpretative act and the biblical outlook and doctrinal orthodoxy it ostensibly served. In late antiquity, this authoritative principle competed with and gradually replaced the older Neoplatonist principle of an internal *symphonia* or accordance among the works of Plato, or between Plato and Aristotle: what now mattered was the potential compatibility of itemized Platonic passages, or even words, with Orthodoxy. The apologists and rhetors clearly stated their intention to selectively apply Plato's text to a Judeo-Christian thought-world, not to explain (far less promote) the meaning of a Platonic passage in its own intellectual context.

This is not to deny that Hellenic exegetes proposed inaccurate or externally influenced reconstructions of Plato's ideas. But Christians went as far as to tamper with Plato's text, and intervene in ways that were not only indifferent to the *symphonia* of Platonic philosophy but dictated by a thought-world external to Platonic philosophy. Put otherwise, Christian apologists never err in the way that Proklos might err when commenting on Plato or Aristotle. This is not because they are always right, but because they consciously opt for a reading that advances to something outside or beyond the interpretation of Plato's text, that is, to a truth that has already been divinely revealed and settled before any engagement with Plato's text.¹⁷

On a second level, the Christianization of Hellenic keywords was not always the product of a natural, "organic," continuous, and unimpeded process of philosophical reflection on what Plato and Aristotle meant. Rather, the apologetic project of a pragmatic appropriation of ancient philosophy was sanctioned as well as conditioned by clerical-political authority, something that never governed the Platonic project in antiquity. The two sides were never symmetrical or equal in the extent to which they could bring outside authority (political, legal, religious) to bear on intellectual debates. Indeed, they were not even playing the same game or had the same goals. Consequently, it is misleading to present the Christian handling of ancient philosophy in the neutral and politically correct terms of "negotiation," "recontextualization," and "narrative" (among others). For this obfuscates the real distinctions between Neoplatonic and Christian intentionality, autonomy, and purposes in interpretation, which authorized (or provided an acceptable pretext for) those violent institutional interventions in the teaching of philosophy aptly described in Damaskios' *Philosophical History* and exemplified by the fate of Hypatia.

Our excursion into the late antique intellectual background explains why the Byzantines had the option of studying Plato or Aristotle at great

¹⁷ These paragraphs summarize the argument elaborated in Siniossoglou 2008, 2010a, and 2010b.

technical depth, while at the same time that study was not intended to arrive at a potentially novel conception of truth, the world, or history. Ecclesiastical experience, tradition, and authority were both sufficient and necessary conditions for orienting the individual toward a collective Orthodox *tropos*, a way to be that was sanctioned by Church and emperor alike. Interestingly, therefore, the most unusual and possibly fascinating philosophical aspects of Byzantine intellectual life lie precisely in the tension between an Orthodox mode of existence and the potentially subverting effects of secular (*thyrathen*) philosophy, as well as heresy. Seen in this light, our study of philosophy in Byzantium is a query regarding the nature and limits of philosophy, namely a philosophical inquiry about philosophy. It should be seen as meta-philosophical and existential, rather than technical and academic.

Before addressing this peculiar feature of the adventures of philosophy, it is important to first review three widespread notions of “Byzantine philosophy” to assess how the discussion so far bears on existing proposals. The first decontextualizes arguments in order to scrutinize their syllogistic and technical aspects irrespective of their doctrinal orientation and the authorial intention they may serve; the second conflates the teaching of philosophy in Byzantium with original philosophical inquiry (what we will here respectively call “curricular philosophy” and “philosophers’ philosophy”); and the third sees in Orthodox theology a natural synthesis of Christian and Hellenic ideas. As it happens, these attempts at construing an independent field of “Byzantine philosophy” are opposed not only to each other, but, as we already implied, also to how the Byzantines themselves commonly applied the word *philosophia* and felt about doctrinal orthodoxy.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN BYZANTINE PERSPECTIVE

One recent trend is to retrospectively differentiate “Byzantine philosophy” from Byzantine theology and rhetoric in order to extract or distil some sort of original philosophical activity pertaining to the reception of ancient thought.¹⁸ So far this approach has presented philologically grounded but philosophically stagnant results. It restricts the scope of “Byzantine philosophy” to a narrow set of rather unremarkable technical discussions of

¹⁸ See, for example, Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012b: 29: “the most reasonable way of dealing with the vagueness of the term ‘Byzantine philosophy’ is to focus on those Byzantine texts and authors that most closely relate, consciously or otherwise, to the concerns of other, more generally recognized, philosophical texts and authors.” See also Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2014: “Byzantine philosophy is the study and teaching of traditional subjects of philosophy in the Greek language between c. 730 and 1453.”

mostly Aristotelian vocabulary. One reason for this is the (anachronistic) dethologization of Byzantine thought.

From the Byzantines' standpoint, any application of philosophical argument was intrinsically subordinate to theology and *a fortiori* to their Orthodox mode of being or existential self-definition. If theology and mysticism are excised from their projects, then so goes authorial intention, for whose sake technical philosophical arguments were used in the first place (as Origen instructed in his letter to Gregory Thaumaturgos, quoted above). Inevitably, the work under study becomes a meaningless assemblage of discrete technical usages, and the Byzantine interest in the vocabulary or linguistic surface (*lexis*) of Aristotle and Plato is presented to modern readers as an anodyne "philosophical" exercise or linguistic game without any reference to the Byzantines' overriding ontological commitment to the Orthodox worldview served by that very appropriation of Hellenic *lexis*.

A good example is John of Damascus' *Dialectica*. The aim of the work is to elucidate terms such as *homoousion*, *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *genos*, and *eidos* not for their own sake or for the sake of philosophical inquiry as such, but against the background of previous theological controversies or formulations. This was no neutral or merely technical philosophical exercise, but polemical theology. John knows well that Aristotle's notion of homonymy is an apt weapon in the hands of iconophiles against Iconoclasts. Did not the latter argue that image and subject should be of the same essence (ὁμοούσιος / *homoousios*)?¹⁹ John's belief is that "rhetoric and argument can be used in subordination to the truth," and it is the truth of Orthodoxy that is here meant.²⁰ It is thus impossible to separate what John was doing with philosophical words from his doctrinal intention. To discount authorial intention is to fail to understand and explicate the thought-world of the historical figure we are studying, as well as to disregard the theological outcome of his endeavor. Significantly, John provides a variety of definitions of philosophy with reference to Plato's *homoiosis theoi* (*Theaetetus*, 176b) and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1060b31), but he concludes that "philosophy is love of wisdom, and true wisdom is God; therefore the love of God, this is the true philosophy."²¹ Philosophy outside Orthodoxy becomes *pseudological*, a tenet of Orthodox thinking with roots in the early apologists and the Cappadocians. Analogously, Maximos the Confessor applies the expression *praktike philosophia* to designate the first step in a threefold ascent toward God, one followed by φυσική θεωρία (*physike theoria*) and θεολογική μυσταγωγία (*theologike mystagogia*). Clearly, here

¹⁹ Parry 2013: 45. ²⁰ Louth 2002: 45.

²¹ John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 136–137 (Kotter). See Chapter 25.

too the word *philosophia* assumes its real meaning only in conjunction with a mystical – and superior – mode of being.²²

Consequently, by retrospectively secluding technical discussions of primarily Aristotelian vocabulary from their theological or mystical aims we are performing a move that would be hardly meaningful to the Byzantines themselves, who did not segregate theological and philosophical world-views, except insofar as the latter were Hellenic and so false, not “true” or “truly” philosophy. In this regard, it is particularly ironic that Maximos the Confessor (or, for that matter, Gregory Palamas) are seen as “Byzantine philosophers” when, in reality, their main concern was to safeguard the autonomy of ecclesiastical experience rather than the autonomy of philosophical discourse. In fact, the distinction that they consistently drew was not between theology and philosophy, but between an inferior human or worldly philosophy and a higher type of ascetic or spiritual philosophy that is very different in essence from the former. In the words of John Klimakos, “there are not many outstanding experts in worldly philosophy. But I would claim that rarer still are those who are truly expert in the philosophy of stillness . . . which means the expulsion of thoughts and the rejection of even reasonable cares.”²³ Statements of this sort require interpreters to take the late antique metonymy of *philosophia* seriously, rather than strive to render it anachronistically conformable to ancient or modern notions of philosophy.

CURRICULAR PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS’ PHILOSOPHY

A second problem with recent attempts at establishing the field of “Byzantine philosophy” is that they blur the distinction between philosophy and the *teaching* of philosophy. To be sure, Byzantine civil functionaries and educated elites enjoyed the liberty of attending various schools transmitting secular knowledge in an encyclopedic and utilitarian fashion. These often operated outside clerical control, which implies that secular education was a “private” or “secular” affair. Constantine IX Monomachos created a professorial position for the teaching of philosophy called the *proedros* or *hypatos ton philosophon*. Important *hypatoi ton philosophon* (“Highest among Philosophers”) included Michael Psellos, John Italos, Theodore of Smyrna, Eustratios of Nicaea, Michael of Ephesos, and Michael of Anchialos.²⁴ They were polymaths and erudites. These Byzantines appear to have been able teachers and commentators of ancient philosophy; the question is whether they were actual philosophers.

²² Maximos the Confessor, *Questions to Thalassios* 64 (pp. 233-732 ff.).

²³ John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 269. ²⁴ See Chapter 1.

To read and comment upon the texts of the ancients is one thing, but to engage in an open-ended dialogue regarding the capacity of these texts to recommend, on reasoned and defensible grounds, a way of life and worldview preferable to Orthodoxy is another. For example, a *katholikos didaskalos* such as Nikephoros Blemmydes took great pains to study Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*.²⁵ Aristotle was traditionally thought to be doctrinally neutral and hence indifferent or even instrumental to Byzantine theological projects.²⁶ Hence, as a rule it was a selective and risk-free reading of Aristotle that the Byzantines favored. Teachers of philosophy appear to have understood well that the study of the logical structure of an argument as well as its encyclopedic value did not imply one's commitment to its purported veracity, nor any obligation to consider its potential effect upon the existential self-definition of students. Blemmydes may have tackled some technical Aristotelian problems, but he cannot be said to have defended or even considered Peripatetic philosophy as a worldview, or to have furthered Aristotelian metaphysics on its own account. The important point is that he would not or could not countenance an Aristotelian position that obviously contradicted Orthodox doctrine.

In Byzantium, potentially dangerous and antinomian Aristotelian ideas (such as the eternity of the world, the divinity of stars, the identity and nature of god, and the omission of piety from the list of virtues) were either left out of discussion and condemned, or had to be neutralized through ideological interventions. Already the late antique commentaries of Olympiodoros, Elias, and Stephanos show great care to avoid the implication that ancient philosophy challenges or competes with Orthodoxy as a way of life.²⁷ It appears more appropriate to say that late antique and early Byzantine commentators on Aristotle provide the prototype of the Byzantine "organic intellectual" (the type of blunt professional teacher of philosophy or philology, commonly subservient to state authority), to apply a Gramscian term that has already been projected onto medieval philosophy by Alain de Libera.²⁸

Things were even more difficult with Platonism, for Plato's philosophy was more firmly associated with Hellenic theology. A good example here is Pachymeres' version of Proklos' commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*. In preparing his text, Pachymeres censored and manipulated Proklos' text, effectively suppressing its intrinsic pagan-Hellenic theological outlook. He thus omits Proklos' "gods who guide nature" and various references to the role of demons and Athena's providence; he even elides the extensive recapitulation of Proklos' theological reading of the

²⁵ Cacouros 2006: 11–13. See Chapters 21–23. ²⁶ Cacouros 1998: 1365.

²⁷ Westernik 1962: xvi–xix. ²⁸ De Libera 1993: 13.

prologue. Pachymeres de-paganizes Proklos' Platonism, producing a technical discussion on the relation between participable and imparticipable forms.²⁹ Whereas Aristotle argued against his predecessors, Pachymeres simply censored his. Obviously, neither erudite censorship à la Pachymeres nor *Schulphilosophie* à la Blemmydes may be easily elevated to the status of open-ended philosophical discussion as understood by either the ancients or the moderns.

Psellos' apologetic position expresses this point:

I have enumerated all these things . . . to make you familiar with Hellenic doctrines. Now I realize that our Christian teaching will clash with some of those doctrines, but it was not my intention to have you exchange the one for the other – *that would be madness on my part* (μαινοίμην γὰρ ἄν).³⁰

Citing Hellenic philosophers in order to teach people what they said just for the sake of *polymathia* while at the same time pointing to their “madness” – Psellos' beloved subterfuge and rhetorical posturing – is not doing philosophy. As Heraclitus had said (fr. 40): πολυμαθίη νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει, “much learning does not teach you how to have a mind.”³¹ To teach Plato and Aristotle is not the same as to philosophize *with* Plato and Aristotle.³²

A useful distinction recently formulated by Paul Richard Blum in connection with early modern philosophy is that between *curricular* or *classroom philosophy* (*Schulphilosophie*) and *philosophers' philosophy* (*Philosophenphilosophie*). The former focuses on technical applications of philosophical vocabulary, through the meticulous study of which philosophy becomes an academic subject, supposedly teachable, rather than an open-ended scientific inquiry of / apprehension into reality.³³ *Curricular philosophy* has a programmatic and preparatory scope and allows little room for – or even formally excludes – intellectual experimentation or personal engagement with the deepest issues in question. Contrariwise, the trademark of *philosophers' philosophy* is individuality and originality; it is to personally assume full responsibility and vouch for one's thoughts independently of institutional guidelines, constraints, or communal patterns.³⁴ As Blum notes, Gemistos Plethon, Marsilio Ficino, and Giordano Bruno

²⁹ Steel and Mace 2006: 81–85. ³⁰ Cited by Duffy 2002: 150; emphasis added.

³¹ On Psellos' use of *polymathia* and related concepts see Duffy 2002. It is ironic that Psellos, who doubtless must have known Heraclitus' dictum, uses *polymathia* as his defense for having a mind – or perhaps, since Psellos was the master of irony, precisely to castigate the ignorant for thinking that *polymathia* means having a mind and doing philosophy.

³² Ironically, a similar situation is increasingly observable in contemporary academia – which, in this regard, is particularly neo-Byzantine: philosophical texts are commonly presented and explained in an analytical fashion, without this entailing the commitment of the exegete to their potential truthfulness, nor any sincere examination of their existential significance.

³³ Blum 1998: 15–26, 253–257. ³⁴ Blum 2012: 4.

are the precursors of *philosophers' philosophy* insofar as they risked deviating from the expected canonical and institutional contents of *Schulphilosophie*.

In Byzantine intellectual life too, we encounter dozens of logical handbooks and epitomes of epitomes, summaries, and exegetical treatises that testify to the presence of a *curricular philosophy* with Aristotelian points of reference. Deviations from *Schulphilosophie* were indeed rare, and it was only after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261 that they seem to have increased, as the Byzantines were forced by circumstances to embark on a project of necessary self-reflection.

As we suggested above, the roots of this divide are traceable in the defeat of Hellenic philosophy in late antiquity. From the closure of the Academy of Athens (529) to the ninth century, the Byzantine curriculum had no option but to remain encyclopedic in scope (*enkyklios paideia*). It did not formally allow for philosophy to exist as an individual discipline, not even as an independent course (*mathema*) within either the *Trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) or the *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music). Things appear changed only around the third part of the ninth century, when *philosophia* is mentioned as a complement or preamble to the existing *mathemata*.³⁵ But even then the aim was to provide potential civil servants or bishops with a basic theological and rhetorical education. As a result, philosophical work appears restricted to linear commentary on works by Plato and Aristotle, or brief texts intended to resolve queries (*λύσεις ἀποριῶν / lyseis aporion*) and dialogical texts loosely conforming to the Platonic model. Leo the Philosopher, who first taught philosophy at the School of Magnaura in Constantinople sometime before 855, Photios (c. 810–post 893), Arethas (c. 850–932), Eustratios of Nicaea (c. 1050–1120), Michael of Ephesos (c. 1120), Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–1272), George Pachymeres (1242–1307), and Nikephoros Choumnos (c. 1250–1327) appear to us based on their surviving works and testimonies more as scholars than philosophers, in the sense that they do not show signs of entertaining the possibility that the Hellenic metaphysical, cosmological, moral outlook might be more true than Orthodox doctrine (or, if not that, then being inspired by it to propose a different solution to the same problems). Their philosophical work is *curricular philosophy* rather than *philosophers' philosophy*. The benefit of the doubt can be given to Eustratios of Nicaea, but this only corroborates the suspicion that philosophy in Byzantium is interesting to the extent that it deviates from the established curricular philosophy, rather than because of its ostensible identification with it.

³⁵ Cacouros 1998: 1376.

HELLENISM AND CHRISTIANITY

There is a third attempt to authorize the study of "Byzantine philosophy" that is older and more interesting than those described above, for it takes seriously the metonymical applications of the word *philosophia* advanced by the Byzantines. It is aptly represented by pioneers of the field such as Endre von Ivanka, Klaus Oehler, and Basil Tatakis and rests on the hypothesis of an intellectual continuity of Hellenic thought within Orthodoxy and Byzantine spirituality.³⁶ According to this view, Orthodox theology *is* philosophy, to the extent that it elaborates upon and incorporates themes taken from ancient philosophy. "Byzantine philosophy" thus defined corresponds precisely to that Orthodox theological worldview which the first approach to "Byzantine philosophy" discussed above ignores or sidesteps in search for technical philosophical discussions ostensibly purified of theological contamination.

The obvious merit of this approach is that it resists the temptation to decontextualize and de-Christianize Orthodox texts. It acknowledges that "Byzantine philosophy," if defensible as a notion, acquires its meaning only within a specifically ecclesiastical, ascetic, monastic, and mystical environment, as well as in juxtaposition to secular tendencies. Modern advocates of a predominantly Orthodox "Byzantine philosophy" often postulate it as the historical fulfillment of a Hellenic-Christian synthesis that extends beyond the level of linguistic signifiers and material culture to that of ideas.

This thesis, however, faces the difficulty that it would not fare well among the Orthodox ascetics themselves and their theoretical exponents. As John Meyendorff argued, Hellenic intellectualism and Christian revelation persisted in a permanent state of tension that Byzantine thought did not manage to overcome: the dominant Orthodox framework never managed to either fully absorb or expel the thorn in its side that was Hellenic philosophy and its specific ideas. "Would Aristotle himself understand Basil of Caesarea?"³⁷ The situation does not seem different from the viewpoint of ancient philosophy, and a similar point can be made about Plato. As Heinrich Dörrie once put it, it might be more apt to speak of "Christian Anti-Platonism" in late antiquity (*Christlicher Gegenplatonismus*) than "Christian Platonism."³⁸ Byzantium employed the Greek language as a means of expression but maintained an ambivalent position toward Hellenic philosophy, exemplified by artificial concessions and compromises on the part of Byzantine humanism. As Meyendorff notes, Psellos was an eclectic intellectual, but he fell short of becoming either a truly great philosopher or a truly great theologian.³⁹

³⁶ Von Ivanka 1964. ³⁷ Meyendorff 1978: 42. ³⁸ Dörrie 1976: 522–523.

³⁹ Meyendorff 1979: 61–63.

The only way around this problem is to assume that the actual content of Byzantine theology is compatible with strands of ancient philosophy at a deeper level than the explicit Byzantine condemnation of Hellenic ideas might have allowed. This assumption authorizes an arbitrary and modern project of effectively correcting what the Byzantines said regarding their own relation to Hellenism, that is of tentatively retrieving an allegedly deeper synthesis between Hellenism and Orthodoxy that Byzantine theologians were not able to see or willing to articulate at the level of labels. The fact remains that the Orthodox Church never sanctioned such a project of retrospectively Hellenizing Christian doctrine, or Christianizing Hellenism. On the contrary, viewed in context individual attempts of this sort understandably bordered on heresy, both in Byzantine times and later.

From this perspective, modern theologians such as Meyendorff are right to insist on Gregory Palamas' approach to Orthodoxy as an existential modality alien to the worldview of Hellenism. Their point – disregarded by most academic approaches to “Byzantine philosophy” – is that Gregory Palamas and Byzantine Orthodox theologians rightly distinguished between the proprium of the Orthodox *tropos* and that of ancient philosophers, and that this distinction was repeatedly reaffirmed by synodal decisions and late Byzantine theology.

In the fourteenth century, the Hesychast controversy made it abundantly clear that both Orthodox theologians and Byzantine humanists were fully aware of the unresolved tension and continuous competition between the Hellenic and patristic traditions. As Ioannis Romanides put it, the Fathers of the Church did not consider Orthodoxy as one philosophical or theological project among others – Orthodoxy was the true way-to-be threatened by experimentations with the ideas of Hellenic philosophy. Thus, the heresy of Prochoros Kydones, who argued that the intellectual energy of God is identifiable with His essence, appeared to Byzantine defenders of Orthodoxy to have evolved out of Aristotelian epistemology, just as much as the Thomist notion of God as *actus purus*.⁴⁰

Today it is tempting to dismiss Meyendorff or Romanides' view of the incompatibility of ancient philosophy and Orthodoxy as representing “robust” Orthodox theology. But their position is effectively Gregory Palamas' position too, as well as that of most Byzantine theologians. Therefore, it cannot be swept under the rug. It has to be engaged with seriously for reasons both historical and philosophical. For example, in a notorious passage Palamas describes “secular wisdom” as a living organism, in fact a poisonous snake. This snake may perhaps be cooked, but only provided that one removes its head and tail, namely “the manifestly wrong

⁴⁰ Romanides 2009: 114; also 2004.

opinions concerning things intelligible and divine and primordial,” as well as pagan imagery and myth. What is left has to be scrutinized and what is “useless” must be separated. Not much of the snake is then left anyway, and Palamas notes that too much “trouble and circumspection” will be required for the task.⁴¹

For his part, Palamas appropriated Aristotelian vocabulary according to these guidelines, while repeatedly condemning Aristotelian epistemology and metaphysics. For example, he openly dismisses the application of Aristotelian *endoxa*, i.e. beliefs and opinions commonly shared by all or the most wise among men (*Topica*, 100a18–21) as a starting point for arriving at theological truth.⁴² He understands theology as intrinsically related to *theophany*, that is unaffected by the epistemological principles resulting from that elementary human consensus so dear to many philosophers. His violent attack on Barlaam’s preference for the spiritual rather than solely grammatical value of Hellenic philosophy is telling. As we showed above, a case can be made that his line of thought extends back to the Cappadocian Fathers, and is indeed typical of Byzantine intellectuals of different periods. For example, Tzetzes sets things in their right context when appropriating Platonic vocabulary to distinguish between a pseudo-philosophy which is ever growing by means of language to the point of nonsense and genuine philosophy as practiced by monks that culminates in silence.⁴³ The former is Hellenic intellectualism that relies on discursive reason while the latter is a superior Christian *philosophia*. From what standpoint are we authorized to make into a continuum two approaches that Tzetzes wants to keep apart?

It is doubtful whether any Byzantine theologians would be any keener than Tzetzes (a classical scholar) or Palamas to allow for the “continuity” of Hellenic philosophy “within” Byzantine Orthodoxy. Their explicit and recurrent condemnation of ancient philosophy, cosmology, epistemology, and ontology refutes the existence of a “Hellenic–Christian” synthesis or even osmosis beyond the lexical and encyclopedic level of utilitarian and eclectic appropriation. And they would approve of David Hume’s saying that the errors in religion are dangerous, but those in philosophy only ridiculous.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most intriguing “error” of this sort was committed by John Italos. By making more concessions to open-ended philosophical inquiry and the interpretation of ancient sources than was expected of him, Italos was perceived to be introducing a breach in a collective Orthodox identity

⁴¹ Palamas, *Triads* 1.1.21. ⁴² Palamas, *Letter 1 (Α προς Ανιδυνον)* 9.16–24.

⁴³ Tzetzes, *Historiae* 412 (10.590–5): Φιλοσοφία μὲν ψευδής ἢ λόγους ὀγκουμένη, ὄντως φιλοσοφία δὲ τῶν μοναστῶν τῶν ὄντως. Αὕτη θανάτου μάθησις καὶ νέκρωσις σαρκίου καὶ γνώσις δὲ τῶν ἀληθῶς καὶ τῶν ὄντως δὲ ὄντων, καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁμοίωσις, ὡς δυνατὸν ἀνθρώποις.

⁴⁴ Hume 1973: 272.

inspired by Hellenic teachings. According to Anna Komnene, one of the things that aggravated Italos' position was that he succeeded in "converting" to his heresies many court officials and even the patriarch.⁴⁵ In this case, independent philosophical thinking and the intention to persuade others led to a condemnation of heresy; in fact, authoritative Christian sources traditionally considered Hellenic philosophy to be the mother of all heresies. According to Anna, Italos was turned over to the Synod by the emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who also supervised his trial. It is sometimes said that the case against Italos was heavily influenced by political motives and that there is no actual evidence of his "heresy" in the file prepared for his condemnation.⁴⁶ But that is irrelevant from the point of view of our methodological inquiry. What really matters is that the articles added to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* take a formal position concerning the limits of free inquiry and toleration, and that it was possible to censor someone on similar grounds – guilty or not. According to the fifth anathema, Hellenic philosophy is rendered uncompetitive insofar as it is a priori divested of any capacity to function as a self-sufficient and potentially superior worldview:

[Anathema on] those who say that the wise men and first heresiarchs of the Hellenes, subjected to anathema by the seven holy and Catholic Councils and by all the Holy Fathers distinguished in Orthodoxy because they were alien to the Catholic Church on account of the abundant falsehood and abomination in their writings, are better by far, both here and in the future judgment, than those pious and orthodox men who sinned through human passion or ignorance.

The anathema is not really concerned with Italos' purported reversion to Hellenic philosophy; rather, it criminalizes the option of his doing so in the first place. Even if we allow that Italos was erroneously accused of deviating from Orthodoxy, the anathema legally proscribes the very option of contemplating the possibility of a philosophical mode of existence antagonistic to Orthodoxy. Thus, questions such as whether Plato's ideas can be self-subsistent and independent of a personal godhead, whether souls can preexist, and whether the universe is perpetually renewed or created ex nihilo, were not at all open to discussion, and this closure was backed by both imperial and ecclesiastical authority.

The seventh anathema sets things straight and condemns

those who study the Hellenic disciplines not only for the sake of educational training but [who] also follow these vain doctrines and believe in them as having certainty, so that they initiate others into these doctrines, some by stealth, others openly, and teach them without hesitation.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Clucas 1981: 17. ⁴⁶ See Chapter 27. ⁴⁷ Translation in Clucas 1981: 154.

Philosophical discourse aiming at a Hellenic–Christian “synthesis” could not easily evolve under such constraints. The problem was emphatically restated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when secular teachers made further moves toward theological innovation. Scandals and inquiries took place whenever they deviated from conformity to prevalent versions of Orthodoxy. The circles (*homilos*) around Barlaam of Calabria, Nikephoros Gregoras at Thessalonike, and Gemistos Plethon at Mistra are the most notable examples. Gregoras occasionally attempted to elevate philosophical and scientific discourse to the status of a self-sufficient criterion able to pass judgment on ecclesiastical life and Hesychast experience. He was thus led to what has been aptly described as a “philosophical ‘anti-theology’ of clearly Neoplatonist inclinations.”⁴⁸ His project was repeatedly condemned and eventually aborted, and he was put under arrest.

To what extent, then, is the Byzantine theological appropriation of philosophical vocabulary and selected notions a philosophically significant move in itself? Today some are tempted to argue that heretics from Eunomios to Gregoras and Plethon were not really heretics, but Christian philosophers; or that the Cappadocians excelled at presenting elaborate arguments. But this is to detheologize or decontextualize their worldview from the prescriptive norms of their society and read theological texts for their argumentative force alone. The assumption of such a “view from nowhere” is an anachronism, for intellectual life was “embedded” in the norms of its late antique and Byzantine context. Orthodoxy was not constructed by persuasion alone, and the decisions of successive Ecumenical Councils, imperial decrees, and episcopal authority carried weight and provided a clear disincentive for “creative” engagement with Hellenism or individual experimentation with Orthodoxy. To ignore these contextual restraints in order to philosophize is possible for us today, but it is doubtful whether this was viable in Byzantium. Paradoxically, then, “Byzantine philosophy” becomes possible only outside the Byzantine context.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A FRESH START

“If Christianity is the truth, then all the philosophy about it is false.”⁴⁹ This note by Ludwig Wittgenstein aptly captures the uneasiness of modern philosophers with attempts to couple the word *philosophy* with claims to a revealed truth. For, properly speaking, the assumption of a shared participation in a divinely sanctioned truth renders its “philosophization” obsolete. In the same vein, Martin Heidegger considered the coupling of

⁴⁸ Moschos 1998: 272–273. ⁴⁹ Wittgenstein 1998: 89.

the words "Christianity" and "philosophy" as unfair to both Christianity and philosophy. The expression "Christian philosophy," one reads in a recently published volume of his notebooks, consists of two halves that do not make up a whole.⁵⁰ Neither the confessional implications of the word Christian nor any necessary prerequisites of the word philosophy are seriously and honestly acknowledged in it; rather, both words are conveniently reoriented toward more loose and hazardless (*harmlos*) concepts in order precisely to authorize the (feel-good) term *Christian philosophy*. This caveat is equally applicable to "Byzantine philosophy," as the scholar largely responsible for its introduction thought of it as interchangeable with "patristic philosophy."⁵¹ And it is pertinent because, on the one hand, Roman Orthodox intellectuals, theologians, and mystics would be bewildered by the unconditional and unqualifiable modern expansion of the word *philosophy* to include both Orthodoxy as an existential *tropos* and the "heresies" of deviant intellectuals; and because, on the other hand, we have already seen that it is doubtful whether Byzantine "classroom philosophy" counts as genuine philosophical discourse freely competing with the doctrinal, clerical, and ascetic tradition. It was scholarship, not philosophy. Not that we wish to denigrate scholarship: to it we owe the Byzantines' preservation of the very texts of Hellenic philosophy (to the extent that they survive) through repeated copying and re-copying, with great philological skill in an act of expiation after a terrible destructive deed: like Achilles, after killing Hector, allowing his lifeless body to be taken by Priam for proper burial rites that would ensure its spectral after-life in Hades.

We have argued that the Byzantine appropriation of Hellenic philosophical vocabulary for theological purposes implied a breach in the relation between philosophical signifiers and their significations that was largely dictated by the needs of Orthodoxy, rather than by any ideal of rational persuasion or open-ended discourse striving to attain an ostensibly mutually acceptable consensus. The problem is not that Platonic and Aristotelian terms were employed in ways incompatible with their original metaphysical, epistemological, or political purposes; rather, that persuasion by philosophical instruction came second to the collective experience and the power of the Church. Therefore, what reasons do we have today for recategorizing both theologians and secular scholars as "Byzantine philosophers" by anachronistically liquidating the confessional rigidity of Orthodox spiritual identity *and* the open-endedness of philosophical discourse?

And yet the antagonistic and hence ambivalent relation that the Byzantines had to Hellenic philosophy resulted in an extended exercise

⁵⁰ Heidegger 2014: 214. ⁵¹ Tatakis 1969: 936–1005.

in meta-philosophy that may well be of wider significance and originality than are their (tenuous) accomplishments in (philological) philosophy itself. Philosophy in Byzantium might well be more significant *as* an original meta-philosophical enterprise rather than because of its contributions to major philosophical questions. The Byzantines did not philosophize as such, yet they did further philosophical activity in an idiosyncratic way. For they were caught again and again in a semi-existential struggle for the definition of Orthodoxy whose roots extended to the late antique Christian–Hellenic clash of worldviews. This accounts for individual attempts by Byzantine *enfants terribles* such as the laymen Psellos, Nikephoros Gregoras, and Plethon to experiment with Hellenic or original philosophical ideas beyond what was expected or wanted from them, as well as for attempts by numerous “heretics” and pioneer theologians to deviate from the mainstream theological, mystical, and clerical norms. Analogously, philosophical acumen is to be found not so much in the Byzantine commentators of Aristotle as in deviations from normative school Aristotelianism.

On a deeper level, the polemical refutation of Hellenism inadvertently and ironically enabled the perpetuation and endless circulation of non-Christian philosophical ideas. Good examples are provided by Nicholas of Methone’s attack on the revival of Proklos in the twelfth century and the *Synodal Tomes* of the fourteenth century summarizing the Hellenizing views ascribed to Barlaam and Gregoras. In these cases, the philosophical views explicitly condemned are also summarized and thus, in a peculiar way, salvaged for posterity. This was above and beyond the mere preservation of ancient works that we mentioned above.

This method for injecting ancient philosophy into the broader discussion was adopted by the likes of Psellos, who offers long and detailed lectures of Neoplatonic exposition framed before and after by the mere disclaimer, “we don’t really believe this stuff, but here it is anyway.” Psellos notoriously fell back on this concept in a famous passage rebutting Xiphilinos’ accusations that he was a true philosophical Hellene. There, he refuses responsibility for the ideas he is transmitting, as well as any personal, existential commitment to their essentially Platonic core: “How dare you,” writes Psellos to Xiphilinos, “most holy and most wise, to suggest that I am one with Plato’s doctrines!” This is an accusation, he goes on, “that I do not know how I could endure!”⁵² And yet Psellos was probably a Platonist philosopher at heart; here he only chooses to pose as the typical Orthodox scholar condemning the repugnant idea of an

⁵² Psellos, *Letter to Xiphilinos* 49. See here Kaldellis 2012: 143.

existential commitment to Plato, in order to defend himself against Xiphilinos' potentially damaging and dangerous accusations. To admit that he took Plato seriously entailed a high personal risk, whereas the condemnation of Hellenic views was easy and often the necessary means to ensure their circulation. Thus Psellos was forced to point out that his comments on Plato hardly meant he was philosophizing in a Platonic way – even if this may have been exactly what he was doing. And the Byzantines knew that to teach Plato did not amount to thinking or living in a Platonic fashion.

Psellos exemplifies the dual aspect of philosophy in Byzantium: there is an outer or social level that requires conformity to an established curricular philosophy and an inner sphere of personal engagement with ideas and their history that remains hidden to us and is hard to trace. The tension between the two aspects of philosophy in Byzantium is in itself philosophically significant and intriguing. If the unpleasant teachers of logic with the long beards described by Italos and Psellos were really doing philosophy, then obviously they did not do so in the way that Italos and Psellos thought of as philosophy.⁵³ This means that the social identity of Italos and Psellos as conformist Roman Orthodox Christians cannot be aligned so easily with their intellectual identities, whatever those were.

Philosophy in Byzantium, then, often surfaces in moments of uneasiness, dissent, and rupture.⁵⁴ It hovers in a grey zone between Orthodoxy and heresy, rather than in any linear or groundbreaking advancement of philosophical systems openly rivaling the Roman Orthodox theological paradigm. Its exciting and fascinating aspects emerge from the tension between teachers' philosophy and various attempts at advancing a deviant or heretical philosophers' philosophy. Seen in this light, the main contribution of the Byzantines to philosophy is their lived and strenuous relation to philosophy itself. Put otherwise, to think about philosophy in Byzantium is to think about philosophy as perennial temptation to heterodoxy and intellectual deviancy.

⁵³ Psellos, *Oratoria minora* 19.35–55. ⁵⁴ Kaldellis 2012: 147–149.

CHAPTER 17
THE FORMATION OF THE PATRISTIC
TRADITION

JOHN A. MCGUCKIN

EARLY SOURCES AND PERIODS IN CHRISTIAN WRITING

The Byzantines approached the record of earlier Christian religious writing in much the same way that they approached the monuments of Hellenic literary and philosophical culture; that is, as examples of an authoritative tradition (*paradosis*) of which they were the legitimate heirs and continuators in a cautiously developmental way – one that saw itself as a careful policy of *renovatio* more than anything else. The Byzantines understood their role within that tradition as maintaining and renewing eternally valid achievements so that the depredations of time would not overcome them. This sense of renewal did not imply, to them at least, a deliberate concept of remaking or proleptic developing, though this was often, in fact, the result. Their collective exemplification of this cultural tradition was part, therefore, of their identity as *Romaioi*: they were a civilization that stood at the apex of Graeco-Roman achievement and was its embodiment as well as its defense against a sea of barbarism. In terms of the religious record, tradition, authority, and renovation, which together implied a complex set of attitudes to the reception and development of ideas, became terms which were peculiarly charged in ways the reception of Homer or Aristotle was not. The formation of what since the eighteenth century has been called the “patristic tradition” is thus, in the eastern Christian world of the late third century onwards, increasingly a twofold notion. First it can stand for the internal logic of Christian ecclesiastical dogmas. Patristics has usually been taken (chiefly by theologians) as a record of the developing doctrinal structure of the Christians in the post-New Testament age through to the eighth century. Secondly, it can also stand for the wider sense in Byzantine society of where religion “fits” into the greater worldview. That is, the sense of how the Christian intellectual heritage is understood to renovate, fulfill, and perfect the destiny of Romanía. This religious perspective, fundamental to the pre-Christian sense of the greatness of Rome by virtue of the blessing of the Capitoline

gods, made its first grand appearance among Christians in the works of Origen of Alexandria.¹

The Byzantines' view of themselves as renovators, not innovators, and as such curators of an antique tradition is rendered more complicated than the antique religious notion that the Romans had advanced through the world by virtue of the blessing of their ancient gods. But this old attitude, so basic to Augustan imperial theory, was deeply conflicted when used in relation to a religious tradition such as Christianity that was so radically innovative in so many respects, and certainly so recent. Nonetheless, it is unarguable that the Byzantines' attitude to the inherited classics of their religious tradition runs along lines that were familiar to them generically from their broader appropriation of traditional Roman cultural values and intellectual monuments. Christian religious writings of earlier ages were canonized (from *kanon*, a measured rule or standard) in several discrete ways.

The earliest wave of literature, the Canon of New Testament Scripture (first to second century) was given the highest status, and all other successive periods of writing were seen as a venerable decline from that pinnacle. This explains why, in the golden age of patristic writing (late third century onwards), so many of the greatest Greek theologians chose the genre of biblical commentary: the expression of their own thinking as a set of annotations on the inspired text, comparable in some ways to how significant commentators on Plato (such as Plotinos) saw themselves as simple continuators – when they were anything but. This primary scriptural wave of Apostolic writings was soon riveted on to the corpus of the Hebrew Scriptures, thus becoming de facto a set of commentaries upon them, but commentaries which were paradoxically afforded a higher status. By the end of the second century, what was increasingly seen as a primary canon of revealed Scripture, became increasingly venerated among all the churches and assumed a high ceremonial (liturgical) role, marking it off even more so from the ordinary theological literature of the Church. It is this second category which we shall now concentrate on, since it is, properly speaking, the literature the Byzantines regarded as “their” patristic tradition. The Gospels and Prophets they approached henceforth more as oracular revelation.

After the New Testament, there came in the second to third centuries the second wave of Christian primitivism (a term used without a dismissive sense). This was when Church writers (few of them bishops at this stage, the majority *didaskaloi* or lawyers) broke free of the Semitic medium of the

¹ Origen, *Against Celsus*, argues that Christian values would lead Rome into a new golden age. The same thesis is found, independently, in the *Divine Institutes* of Constantine's religious advisor, Lactantius, and enters the golden age of Greek Patristic writing through Eusebios of Caesarea.

scriptural texts in both intellectual imagination and literary expression. This is often called the age of Apostolic Fathers or the Age of the Apologists,² so-called from the fact that much of this literature is attempting to justify (give an *apologia* for) Christian lifestyles in a context of state and societal animosity. This was when intellectuals started to turn their minds to the expression of Christian thought through the media of Greek cosmology and ordered systems of ethical philosophy. These first efforts had their moments of bright inspiration and enjoyed a lively cohort of authors,³ but were looked back on in later periods as less than helpful. They did not have a long influence. They were preserved by Byzantine theologians as monuments of the ancestral writings but were rarely if ever cited, except by Byzantine historians and archivists. Eusebios of Caesarea, the librarian-bishop and head of Origen's school in the early fourth century, catalogues and holds up these writings in the early books of his *Ecclesiastical History* to demonstrate to the ascendant Church of the Constantinian age that they were not a crowd of intellectual ingénues. But the way the structure of that book culminates in an encomium of Origen gives the game away that even he knew that it took the Church three centuries before it could produce an internationally significant intellectual. So, if the second wave was Apologetic literature, the third was marked by the arrival of a stellar thinker, Origen of Alexandria (c. 186–255), who deeply absorbed Greek cosmological and philosophical forms and whose intellectual legacy extended to the most important of the Greek Fathers of the fourth to sixth centuries; he also left behind a large body of massively influential writings that themselves set the theological agenda of the golden age of patristic writing in the fourth century.

It is useful to make a further distinction within this patristic period. From the fifth century to the eighth, that is from Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378–444) to John of Damascus (c. 655–750), we enter the mature creative stage of Byzantine theology which looks back to the previous patristic age, codifies it, and closely comments upon it (the thought-worlds of the biblical period and the Apostolic Fathers largely escaped them by this stage). Cyril's achievements were based on his close reading of the earlier "Fathers of the Church" and he carefully excludes voices whom he defines as not being Fathers at all: some writings were classified as heresy (*haireisis*)⁴ and thus not part of the canon of authorities. Cyril was also the

² The Apostolic Fathers wrote roughly contemporaneously with the last of the New Testament texts (c. 90–120), and include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Papias of Hierapolis, and the authors of the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*; the Apologists wrote mostly in the second and third centuries.

³ Including the Greek writers Aristeides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, and Irenaeus of Lyons, and the Latin authors Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Lactantius.

⁴ In classical Greek thought *haireisis* signifies a legitimate difference of opinion (for example in or among philosophical schools). Beginning in the catholic epistles of the New Testament (especially those of John and Peter) the word is already changing to signify an evil division among Christians in

one who, when he appropriated to himself the presidency of the Council of Ephesus in 431, set up in the preliminary database-gathering for that council a new method of gathering florilegia of previous authoritative authors commenting on the focused theme of Christology (the matter in dispute at that Council). Cyril presented the dossiers he had commissioned from his own scribes in the Alexandrian chancery to the bishops at Ephesus in order to demonstrate that Nestorius' works were at odds with received tradition.⁵ After this point, Byzantine theologians were increasingly concerned to demonstrate by means of accumulated citations of authorities that their works were in harmony with an "official" tradition. Cyril's dossier of authorities is the first time that "patristic" becomes a precise and technical term. Prior to the fifth century, Christian writers had appealed to earlier tradition but had been vague as to who exactly exemplified it. Athanasios of Alexandria, for example, never admits to the extensive amount of influence Origen had on his own work. Gregory of Nazianzos, in turn, uses Athanasios without adverting to him other than in a celebratory oration that hails him as a great pillar of faith but neglects to give any details of the great man's intellectual work.⁶ Cyril himself attended, as a young deacon, his uncle Theophilos' rigged Synod of the Oak at Chalcedon, to depose the patriarch John Chrysostom who had fallen foul of the imperial court. But throughout his own exegetical writings he inserts extensive sections of Chrysostom's exegesis without ever admitting his source. Whole books of Origen were similarly "incorporated" by Jerome, often without any reference. What strikes us as a pandemic of plagiarism was standard procedure for ancients recycling literature. It was the exception, not the norm, for episcopal writers to give chapter and verse. As Cyril had established in the Acts of Ephesus, this new process of exact citation was a legal method, appropriate in times of judicial trial – Cyril intended the Council of 431 as an ecclesiastical trial of Nestorius – not so much in terms of general reception of dogma.

At the end of this second phase of the patristic age, therefore, into the eighth century, we find the authoritative figure of John of Damascus, a great compendium-creator. Even in this modality, where he is deliberately trying to create ready sets of simplified access to central doctrines of

matters of belief, stirred up by Satan. The earliest councils of the second and third centuries, and even Nicaea (325), were notable for incorporating public debate before dogmatic decisions were taken. Later councils took an increasingly harsh line against perceived heretical deviation. As doctrine was more clearly established, "heresy" became more rigidly elaborated by contrast. In Byzantium, heresies were catalogued and new schools of thought were increasingly labeled as either in accord with such and such a Patristic exemplar, or such and such a heresy, with Manichaeism, Sabellianism, Novatianism, and Arianism the favorite (and generally anachronistic) ones used to dismiss perceived deviations.

⁵ The texts relating to the Council of Ephesus are available in French translation: Festugière 1982.

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 21.

the Church, presumably for clergy and aristocrats, his work still shows evidence of a fine and lively intellect. But the signs are already visible in later Byzantine times (from the ninth century onwards) that the maintenance of a system of theology demanded more attention than the renovation of it, and with a few exceptions (later Hesychasm, for example, as represented by Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, when currents of western philosophical thought had stirred the eastern court) late Byzantine theology was a slow-running stream in comparison to Latin theology. Let us look now in more detail at the formation of the patristic tradition in its four main tranches: the emergence from the biblical era; the impact of Origen; the classical patristic age; and the reception of patristic thinking among later Byzantine writers.

THE BIBLICAL SOURCES AND THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Byzantine thinkers did not regard the Scriptures (what Origen had by the third century taxonomically distinguished as the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament”) as part of the patristic tradition. Christian leaders of the late first and early second centuries, among them significant bishop-theologians such as Clement of Rome (fl. c. 96) and Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 135–200), made decisive moves toward the formation of a canon of early Christian literature in their intellectual and social struggles against Gnostic theosophists who wished to render most existing Christian literature into myths symbolizing highly speculative and escapist cosmologies. The encounter with theorists such as Marcion of Sinope (d. c. 154), who questioned the very logic of the Church holding to the foundational texts of Judaism (which he saw as a misleading cult of an angry and vindictive daimonic lesser god), also made Christian writers consider what exactly was the relation between the evangelical narratives about Jesus and that great body of Jewish historiography, cult, and ceremonial law that they had (often without thinking about it) assumed as sacred reading in some way belonging to them too. The rationale of a Church body, now predominantly gentile, adopting a corpus of law it did not largely observe, had excited scrutiny from earliest times, as the corpus of Pauline letters demonstrates, most of which derive from the middle of the first century. But the extreme examples of theosophical gnosticism that reduced Scripture to allegorical cosmological codes, on the one hand, and Marcionism on the other, arguing for a literal reading of the text but attributing it to a corrupt anti-god (a religion with nothing in common with Christianity), scared the Church and spurred on its intellectuals to articulate a clearer position on reception and about continuities within discontinuities. Replacing what had been an unformed and unfocused Christian attitude to Israel’s Scriptures (other than that they were hallowed and revelatory), second-

century writers made two moves that can be regarded as embryonic creations of their own sense of what constituted a canonical literature.

The first of these moves was the collation of a corpus of significant "Apostolic" writings. This was, of course, the formation of the New Testament. The small and scattered accounts of Jesus' life, signs, and teachings had been shaped largely by liturgical commemorative forces which gave the Passion Narrative a precedence and cast its shadow over all teaching materials, yet also by the demands of the early missionaries, which valorized accounts of Jesus' exorcisms and signs as archetypes of their own self-modeling, as traveling exorcists and evangelists. Very quickly these early texts were attributed to the authorship of the first generation of Apostles. After some controversy, Pauline literature was also classed in the same category and, though the precise links of all these texts to first-generation followers was historically vague, this kernel of the New Testament became the authoritative "Apostolic" record of Christian origins.

The second move was a series of more sophisticated attempts, between the second and third centuries, to correlate the great disparities of the Hebrew Scriptures (prophetic exhortations, ancient history of religion, legal prescripts, and antique and antiquated ceremonial legislation) with the ethos and concepts prevalent in the new core of evangelical literature. This difficult work of correlation had not been resolved by Jesus, nor substantially addressed by him, who is affirmed as teaching a doctrine of continuation (Matthew 5:17-18: "Not one detail shall pass from the Law") *and* one of discontinuity (Matthew 12:5-8: "I tell you this, something greater than the temple is here," a teaching for which he would be executed). The issue had been accelerated by Paul in the generation immediately after Jesus; his works set the classic terms for a developmental relation which perfected an authoritative but limited past. In other words, the Old Testament was given authority, but not an unlimited one. The key to how this was done was the increasing adoption by Christian intellectuals of the allegorical method. This was the manner of literary interpretation favored in Alexandria, whereby a set of ancient texts could be coordinated as authoritative references for a new system of teachings or a new set of social conditions which would otherwise have rendered the ancient literature obsolete. How the Semitic world of the Old Testament is incorporated into the thought-processes of second-century gentile Christians is not too far removed from the intellectual systems by which the scholars of the Alexandrian Library had appropriated Homer and the other classics; or the way the philosophical traditions of Hellenism advanced through the adaptations of successive schools.

Although the precise stages of that embryonic growth are shrouded in obscurity (despite many speculative scholarly models proposed in recent

decades), it is fairly clear that by the start of the third century Christians widely had a sense of a canonical group of sacred texts that set the Gospels over the Hebrew Scriptures as their completion and fuller exegesis, and were also able to use allegorical methods of interpretation to plot the links between these two different types of sacred libraries. The third element that capped these foundation stones was the ascent of the office of the superintending liturgical “president.” Again, little is known exactly, despite many speculations and presumptions in the literature.⁷ From primitive times, where a council of elders (*presbyteroi*) is thought to have directed the affairs of local Christian communities, the second to third centuries witnessed generally a preference for the administration of a single presidential leader, an *episkopos* or “overseer” (the Anglo-Saxon corruption of which gave the word bishop). The single direction of a bishop gave cohesion to the ongoing struggle with independent Christian philosophers of the Gnostic type which continued throughout the second and third centuries. Bishops tended by default to pastoral caution. Irenaeus of Lyons was a prime example of how one of the more articulate among them erected a rule of theology in his influential work *Against the Heresies*, a rule or canon that was to become widespread as a foundational definition of Christian catholicity (*dogma katholikon kai apostolikon*).

The Irenaean synthesis suggested that the rules of Orthodoxy were to be based upon a fourfold conformity: adherence to the Gospels; loyalty to the terms of the baptismal confession (the credal formulary, *kanon pisteos*, or rule of faith); submission to the spiritual authority of the presiding bishop as arbiter of faith and guardian of tradition (expressed through his evangelical preaching and supervision of the rites); and (Irenaeus adds theologically) a willingness to recognize that all things run to Christ, the Alpha and Omega (which we might postulate as the root of Christocentric eschatology in all Byzantine theology). This architecture that we see in Irenaeus brings to an end the first stage of the foundation of Orthodoxy. It revolves around a liturgical ritual that grew ever more elaborate and more universally observed; its scriptural and credal elements were highlighted and reinforced and the episcopal and Christological centrality was constantly reaffirmed. This quadrilateral system is the bedrock foundation for what would emerge as the patristic tradition of the later Church. Before that could happen, however, a last stage was required, one that would allow this fundamentally internal system of Christian thought (based as it was on prophetic and eschatological writings) to be extendable to the broader

⁷ The traditional account imagines a steady progression from the charismatic founding of churches by Apostolic missionaries toward a standardized ecclesiastical polity of the monarchical episcopate (supported by presbyters and deacons); it is drawn out from such early texts as the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, two early examples of the rise of the *episkopoi*.

world of Hellenistic culture. It was Origen of Alexandria who forged the linkage and thereby became the grandfather of the golden age of patristic theology.

ORIGEN'S DYNAMIC LEGACY

Origen was the son of a professional *grammaticus* in Alexandria and, after his father's death as a martyr in the persecution of 202, he assumed the leadership of his school; he later set up as a philosophical *didaskalos*. His work is a synthesis of Platonic and Pythagorean thought, but marked off as Christian philosophy because of his subordination of the cosmological aspects to an overriding biblical imperative – he reads the entire biblical corpus as one vast system, closely correlated in all its parts and moving toward a single revelation of the appearance of the Eternal Logos of God within history for the enlightenment of his creatures.⁸ Origen's exegesis was governed by the premise that Scripture was a coherent corpus emanating from the supreme *nous*, the creative Divine Logos. The Bible's apparent multiplicities were but the masking of eternal revelation under the illusory appearances of history and material relativity. As a text, therefore, it had several layers of meaning. It had a historical sense (such as Israel taking possession of the Promised Land from the Canaanites), a moral meaning (the fight for the Promised Land more profoundly connoted the individual's constant battle for moral control of his own psyche), and a mystical meaning (which Origen saw as the real or highest meaning): in this instance the entry to the Promised Land represents the soul's communion with God in the Kingdom which is to come after this earthly cosmos passes away. Allegorical, or spiritual, interpretation was constantly his preferred method, and in this he was not far removed from the literary-philosophical methods established at the Library. Texts which had an "impossible" meaning (obnoxious moral tales in the Old Testament, or stories that were clearly unhistorical) were, for Origen, like special page-markers left in Scripture by the Logos, designed to make intelligent souls stop and realize that a deeper mystery lay buried like a treasure in the field. For Origen, those who stayed only with the literal meaning of the text were unenlightened souls who had not realized that Jesus gave some of his teaching in the valleys and some on the mountain tops. Only to the latter disciples, those who could ascend the mountains, did Jesus reveal himself transfigured.

Origen was the first internationally significant philosopher the Christian movement had yet produced. In the course of a long career he more or less created the genre of biblical interpretation for subsequent generations. Even when his reputation was posthumously damaged (his writings were

⁸ McGuckin 2004; Crouzel 1989.

anathematized after many generations of controversy when the emperor Justinian ordered their condemnation in 543), his rules of exegesis survived because of their collation by the Cappadocian Fathers Gregory of Nazianzos and Basil of Caesarea into the *Philokalia of Origen*, and went on to shape almost all Latin and Greek exegetical theory,⁹ even down to the nineteenth century. His immense work of synthesis entailed correlating a sprawling biblical library into one overriding story of Christocentric salvation; aligning biblical text and philosophical cosmology; and harmonizing the theological thrust of an “Old Testament” with the Gospels as a New. All this was carried off so brilliantly that he became the most important influence on Christian thinking for the next two centuries. Even when he was being deliberately resisted, as for example in his doctrine of the preexistence of souls and the subordinationist state of the Son and Spirit within the Trinity, he still had managed to “set the agenda” of the arguments. The two great protagonists of the early fourth century, Athanasios and Arius of Alexandria, were both coming, from apparently diametrically opposed viewpoints about the status of the Divine Logos, simply from different aspects of the Origenian data culled from different treatises.¹⁰

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE FATHERS

The Greek-speaking Christian world between the fourth and the sixth centuries was one of the most vital periods in the history of Christian theology. It was a time of factions and conflicts, both political and intellectual, which at times threatened the Church’s coherence and long-term survival. The intellectual demands made upon Christian thinkers of that period, however, led to the adoption and development of basic positions that would define Christianity for centuries to come and give to the Byzantine Church its common understanding of doctrine and Christian thought more generally. Almost all the “Fathers”¹¹ cited by the Byzantines as authorities and as exemplars of Orthodox tradition derive from this period. It is especially in the fourth century (wracked by the

⁹ The Syro-Byzantine writers of the school following Theodore of Mopsuestia, Eustathios of Antioch, and Diodoros of Tarsos resisted Origen’s influence. But by the time of John Chrysostom of Antioch (c. 354–407), archbishop of Constantinople, even the Syrian exegetes were heavily influenced by Origen’s thought.

¹⁰ Origen had taught both the pre-temporal (thus eternal) origination of the Logos, and his subordination to the supreme God and Father. The Arian and Nicene parties each took a separate arm of this (once) conjoined teaching, and, by dividing it into two opposing camps, set up the terms of reference for the two camps of the Arian crisis.

¹¹ The word and its cognate adjective (patristic) derive from the title of a bishop (*pater, abba*) and reflects the fact (not true of earlier times) that almost all the significant teachers of the fourth century were clerics.

international conflict now known as the Arian controversy) that we see refined and tested centrally important understandings of the nature of God and God's involvement with the world; the dynamic significance of the person and work of Jesus, the concept of the Trinity, the ways deemed appropriate of reading the scriptural foundations of Christian thought, the forms of the churches' liturgical and sacramental life, and the infrastructures of local and global ecclesiastical organization. Many of these matters were not to be seriously thought about again, or challenged in their essential structure, until the late Middle Ages.

The Alexandrian theologians, especially Athanasios and Cyril, archbishops of that great metropolis when it was still the intellectual and ecclesiastical capital of the east,¹² were among the most important theologians of this time and have always been regarded as among the highest of the Fathers of the Church. Athanasios was important for defending the Nicene Creed, attacking Arianism, and explaining how to approach Christology (the Church's understanding of the divine person of Christ) as a salvific (soteriological) phenomenon. He succinctly defined the relation between the Incarnation of the Logos and the refashioning of man: "He [the Logos] became Man so that Man might become god."¹³ Cyril elaborated his thought in more nuanced ways and gave to the Byzantine world a vision of Christ's Incarnation as a moment when divinity and humanity (the transcendent and the created) met in an intimate new fusion of the God-man who, in that mystery, actually refashioned creation. Before the Incarnation, Cyril taught, humanity had a bounded and mortal nature (that of Old Adam), but in the Incarnation God the Word has made his own mysterious fusion of divine human realities into a paradigm for all his race (the Church) and given them a new humanity (New Adam). This humanity was now given the potential of divinization as a grace (*theiopoiesis*, deification). Cyril was afforded the title "Seal (*sphragis*) of all the Fathers."

Theologians of the generation after Athanasios, such as the Cappadocian Fathers, would develop this new mystical anthropology to a great extent, and their formulation would remain dominant to the end of Byzantine theological literature, though the writings of such as Maximos the Confessor (seventh century), John of Damascus (eighth), and Gregory Palamas (fourteenth). Deification theory among the Greek Fathers is not merely a warming up of old Roman imperial ideas of *apotheosis*; it is

¹² After the mid-fifth century, Alexandria would lose its place of prominence to Constantinople. The latter had been dedicated in 330 but did not rise to real ecclesiastical prominence until it had, over time, absorbed the jurisdictional territories of earlier eastern sees. The Ecumenical Councils of 381 and 451 gave Constantinople a towering role in the international governance of Christian affairs, which annoyed Rome and Alexandria.

¹³ Athanasios, *On the Incarnation of the Word of God* 54; see Gross 2002; Russell 2004.

a striking new way to correlate biblical theologies of redemption using the concepts of philosophical anthropology. What the mainstream of Greek thought had understood about material natures was that they were enclosed within their own limits. This was fundamental to the essence of a nature (*ousia*). The Alexandrian Fathers argued that if the Divine Word, whose nature knew no bounds and belonged to no *genus* limited by its own *termini*, had freely entered into a Union (*henosis*) and not a mere correlation (*synapheia*, or vague association, *schesis*, as their opponents had argued) then Immateriality had made materiality its own, appropriated it, in the single person of the Divine Logos who was now God-man. And in this appropriation, a potentiality for unbounded life had passed to created humanity (the flesh of the divine Christ). Thus, as Christ rose from the dead because he could not allow his body to suffer mortality (even though he had allowed it to die), so too had he passed this victory on to his new race of Christians, affording to them the potentiality for immortal life even in their mortal flesh.

The later Byzantine period, as exemplified in the works of Maximos the Confessor, elaborated this doctrine of the transmission of divine energy through the Incarnation (what the Latin Church would develop along the lines of a terminology of grace) and approached it chiefly as a salvific matter of the divine refashioning of anthropology. It also fixed it in its ascetic doctrine; thus a major focus of Byzantine monastic writing was the monk as the exemplar of a progressive assimilation into, and transfiguration by, the divine Christ. For the post-Maximos generation, the iconic notion of the Transfiguration of Jesus¹⁴ became one of the most common tropes of ascetic theology.

The Alexandrine theology of Athanasios and Cyril was one pillar of the “patristic house.” The centrality of Logos theology in it was obvious. The Incarnation of the divine on earth, for the salvific rescue of fallen souls, was the core around which all revolved. It was a defense of this notion of the direct, unmediated, and personal encounter of the Logos of God with his own material world that led Athanasios to attack Arianism throughout his life – a life given over to immense amounts of apologetic, and personally costing him numerous exiles and rousing against him a great body of enemies during much of the fourth century. At the end of his life, Athanasios turned his attention to achieving a settlement on theological method and “core content” in the Christian world. His survey of the state of Christian disruptions had shown him that neither the biblical exegesis of select texts, nor reliance on synods of bishops, nor philosophical speculation could happily serve as a sure path toward consensus over catholicity of doctrine. In his *Letters to Serapion*, Athanasios signaled a change of direction

¹⁴ Mark 9:1 ff.; see McGuckin 1987.

that would exert a massive influence over what later generations regarded as “patristic tradition.” In these letters to one of his suffragan bishops in the Thebaid, Athanasios argued that liturgical practice ought to determine what is believed by the Church Catholic: it is sacramental texts and rituals that demonstrate theology most fully. He begins what would extend into a major discourse on the Trinity in this way, setting out principles of theological method: “It will not be out of place to consider the ancient tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church, which was revealed by the Lord, proclaimed by the Apostles, and guarded by the Fathers. For upon this faith the Church is built, and if anyone were to lapse from it, he would no longer be a Christian either in fact or in name.”¹⁵ His subsequent argumentation proceeds, in the *Letters to Serapion*, to answer the Egyptian bishop’s basic question: Given that the Logos is to be confessed as God from God, in harmony with the Nicene Creed, what is the status of the Holy Spirit? Is this Spirit too divine, or should it be seen more as an agency of God, an angelic power, or an abstract way of referring to either Father or Son? Athanasios teaches that if the Spirit of God is confessed in the liturgical rites as deifying the believer in baptism (not simply purifying or consecrating), then it must *be* God: since none other than the deity can confer the gift of deification.

This is a significant moment in Christian history, not only as it marks the beginning of the final stages of the classic doctrine of God as Trinity, but also more precisely because it lays down the basis of what the term “patristic” came to mean in the late fourth century: first, concordance with liturgical and earlier (Apostolic) tradition, and secondly a doctrinal stance that conveyed spiritual communion. The theologian henceforth had to be the saint, not the professor, because only those who possessed the spirit were validated as interpreters of the Spirit. Patristic theology is to be ascetical henceforth, rooted in sacramental context and mystical experience. It is no coincidence that from this time onwards all ancient Christian theology becomes clerical. It is also why, even in the more established times of Byzantine imperial foundations, theology never assumed the position of a university school curriculum subject. It remained ever lodged in the Patriarchal school (or in provincial episcopal chanceries), a subject, in the east, for monks and clergy.

Athanasios expresses this theory of inspiration eloquently at the end of his treatise *On the Incarnation* when he speaks about who can (or cannot) interpret Scripture:

But for the searching of the Scriptures and true knowledge of them, an honourable life is needed, and a pure soul, and that virtue which is according to Christ; so that

¹⁵ Athanasios, *Letter 1 to Serapion* 28.

the intellect guiding its path by it may be able to attain what it desires and to comprehend it, in so far as it is accessible to human nature to learn concerning the Word of God. For without a pure mind and a modelling of the life after the saints, a man could not possibly comprehend the words of the saints.¹⁶

Athanasios' fifth-century successor, Cyril, would elevate this into a doctrinal principle at the Council of Ephesos in 431, and after that point it became dogmatically constituted as the patristic method of theology. Cyril, contending with Nestorios of Constantinople over the right interpretation of Christology (how many personal centers there were in the Incarnate Logos),¹⁷ adduced at the council a massive dossier of prior "Fathers of the Church" who supported his view. After him, this method of adducing patristic precedent became fundamental. Cyril, as it were, put the cap on Athanasios' advocacy of a new method and new principles within what constituted an increasingly quantifiable patristic tradition (*paradosis ton pateron*). When Byzantine writers after the sixth century look back and refer to this tradition, it is the writers of the time between Athanasios and Cyril that they chiefly cite. We need to add one qualification to this (which is important insofar as most modern textbooks generally neglect it, being focused too exclusively on the concept of patristics as merely history of dogma), and it is that the Byzantine writers also understand the canonical tradition to be a deep part of the "tradition of the Fathers." This canonical tradition is what emerges from the growing body of Church law attached to the Ecumenical Councils: the canons were not simply a dossier of biblical books, but also a set of religious prescripts soon to be afforded the force of imperial law. The conciliar decrees also attracted into themselves a series of ecclesiastical court opinions of leading bishops such as Basil of Caesarea and Amphilochios of Ikonion, whose pastoral and ethical instructions were increasingly given legal status after the sixth century. The importance of this legal-canonical aspect of the tradition of the Fathers in the eastern Church is closely related to the prevalent doctrine of *symphonia*, namely that Church and state were the two lungs of the body

¹⁶ Athanasios, *On the Incarnation* 57.1–2.

¹⁷ Nestorios advocated a traditional Syrian approach: the Incarnated Logos had two personal reference points, the Eternal Logos and the Man Jesus. To each of these, separately, were attributed what was appropriate to each – divine aspects to the Logos, human aspects to the Man. And a third reference point was established in theological language conveying the "association" of both person-centers in the Christ. So, for Nestorios, Christ was a referent for commonality, but Logos and Jesus (or terms such as God and Man) were referents for differentiation. Cyril regarded this as not only semantically schizoid but also tending to suggest that there were two or three "persons" in Christ: the divine second person of the Trinity, a human person called Jesus, and a "prosopon of union" called Christ. On the contrary, Cyril taught there was one single person, and that divine, which was the single subject-referent of all things that happened before and in the Incarnation. This person was the divine Logos who assumed flesh. Cyril coined the word *hypostasis* to express this, taking personhood out of the concept of accidentalism it had in prior Greek thought, into the domain of being an ontological subsistent. See McGuckin 1994.

politic. Church law and civil law were seen not as separate spheres but as distinct zones combining in a synthesis presided over by the divinely appointed emperor.¹⁸

If Athanasios was seen by Byzantine Church writers as the classical representative of the patristic golden age, then it was his younger contemporaries who formed the final synthesis that merged Origen with Athanasios and made of the patristic heritage a transferable literary corpus that was recycled generation after generation in Byzantium. This era, beginning more or less after Athanasios' death and extending into the fifth century with Cyril and John Chrysostom, was dominated by a group of younger Nicene theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers. The main writers of this group were Basil of Caesarea (330–379), his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (331 or 340 to 395), and their family friends Gregory of Nazianzos (c. 329–390) and Amphilochios of Ikonion (c. 340–403). Gregory of Nazianzos, perhaps the most learned man of his century, pagan or Christian, was the tutor of Gregory of Nyssa, and the latter's deacon, Evagrius of Pontus, was loaned to him while the older Gregory composed his monumentally important *Five Theological Orations*,¹⁹ which set out the Church's classical Trinitarian theology, while he was presiding over the Council of Constantinople in 381. Gregory's literary corpus became, from the middle to the later Byzantine periods, second in extent only to the Bible in terms of manuscript copying and transmission. The Council of Chalcedon (451) retrospectively bestowed upon him the title of "The Theologian," and his *Orations* were the standard curriculum for clerical theology up to the end of the first millennium. It was this generation that laid to rest the final controversies of the Arian crisis, setting out Nicene thought as the standard for all later ideas of what constituted Orthodoxy. Their works, therefore, were always high on the agenda of the authorities who defined for the Byzantines, in times of dissent, what Orthodoxy was. Basil would be known to later generations as the father of eastern monasticism. The Byzantines always liked to flirt with Egyptian and Syrian modes of monasticism (tales of the Desert Fathers and histories of the Syrian monks being much prized reading in the capital),²⁰ but it was Basil who was the architect of the most common Byzantine monasticism of the "cenobitic" type.²¹ It was he who inspired the ninth-century Constantinopolitan monastic reformer Theodore the Stoudite, whose organizational work gave Basilian monastic ideas their

¹⁸ McGuckin 2012. ¹⁹ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* 27–31; see Norris 1997.

²⁰ An example of this type of armchair asceticism for Constantinopolitan pious readers is Palladios' *Lausiak History*.

²¹ From *koinos bios* or monasticism of a "life shared in common."

classic form of organization across the eastern empire, in a soon-to-be-standard *Typikon* (or Monastic Rule).²²

Monastic lore, philosophy, and ascetic and mystical doctrine grew after the fifth century into a vast body of literature embracing hagiography, anthropology, and metaphysics. This too was regarded by the Byzantine world as part of the greater “patristic tradition.” It was actually called the *Paterika* by Byzantine churchmen. It was exemplified by such extensive collections as the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the *Evergetina*, and, in early modern times, *The Philokalia*. These ascetic and hagiographical writings have only recently started to attract greater scholarly attention. Theologians who looked at them in the earlier part of the twentieth century were not interested in a body of literature that did not, at first sight, illuminate the history of doctrinal controversy that was their chief interest. More classically trained Byzantine historians of the same period were only remotely interested in the numerous hagiographies of this era, and only for what could be distilled from them, almost incidentally, about social history. In future research, to place the *Paterika* beside Byzantine canonical collections, ascetic literature, and dogmatic controversies would finally afford scholarship a more complete and accurate perspective on what the Byzantine Church itself understood as its religious heritage.

Gregory of Nazianzos and Cyril also made great strides in synthesizing for Christians some of the important ideas of the late Greek philosophical tradition. Some brief examples of their monumental labors may be gained if we consider that Gregory’s idea of God as Trinitarian communion brought the category of relationality into the heart of metaphysics. Cyril’s idea of the single divine personhood of Christ similarly brought the notion of individual subjectivity out of the hinterland of accidental categories, where Aristotle had left it, to be one of the core ideas of future Christian anthropology and ontology. Both moves radically altered the trajectory of the thought-world of subsequent Christian societies, and have shaped intellectual presuppositions up to the present era.

Maximos the Confessor²³ was an example (increasingly rare) of an intellectual who was cognisant of this rich tradition and the extent to which earlier Fathers had incorporated and altered the classical philosophical heritage. He was able in his corpus to synthesize the monastic tradition of ascetic mysticism (the inner landscape of developing human consciousness by radical focus) with the intellectual heritage he found in the great philosophical Fathers such as Origen, Gregory of Nazianzos, and

²² As Benedict’s *Rule* became the standard observance for all regular monastic communities in the west after the Carolingian period, so Basil’s *Asketikon* became the same in the east through Theodore’s version of it in his Stoudite *Typikon*.

²³ See Thunberg 1965; Louth 1996.

Gregory of Nyssa. His works, however, were couched in rather difficult and elevated Greek and he wrote in strenuous opposition to the emperor of his day who eventually mutilated and deposed him. Accordingly, his literary remains, while they circulated among devotees, never assumed a monumental “patristic status” until modern times. In the latter part of the twentieth century, they underwent a revival that has now revealed him as among the greatest of the Byzantine religious writers, an intellectual who gives the lie to the much repeated cliché that religion was stultified in the later Byzantine era and was a sign par excellence of the ossification of thought and imagination.

THE BYZANTINE AFTERMATH OF THE PATRISTIC TRADITION

After Maximos there were few Byzantine religious writers who stood out in the same way, other than the (large) continuing body of mystics and poets. Later religious writing continued to produce much that was memorable, good, and new in terms of ascetic mysticism and inspired poetry, but more and more religious writers preferred to make *compendia* of great theological orations, doctrinal treatises in digest form, canonical collections (*Nomokanons*), and sermon-books. A chief example was the increasing practice of presenting the homiletic works of John Chrysostom as the expected source (to be repeated verbatim) for later Church preaching. Monks and liturgists excelled, and the last ages of the imperial liturgy in the remaining great cathedrals passed on its remarkable and elegant legacy to the enduring world of eastern Orthodoxy, which to this day structures its services on the model of the last age of patristic hymnography.²⁴ But the eastern tradition ceased to have its leading edge provided by orators and philosopher-theologians as it had in earlier times and settled into a quieter, more mystical modality; its leading thinkers became monastics desirous of painting the topography of the soul and its reflective capacities. One of the last great Byzantine “crises” in the ecclesiastical world, exacerbated by a civil war in the fourteenth century, was Hesychasm. The main theologians of this era, such as Gregory of Sinai (c. 1260–1346) and Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), invoked the classical patristic heritage to characterize everything they did and said as a faithful continuation of the earlier Fathers. But in the process it is clear that they had lost the thought-world that was the context of the golden age of the Greek Fathers, which had energized their thinking, and it is equally apparent that the later writers shifted the field of battle away from metaphysical matters to the more intimate scenario of the proper manner of mystical meditation. The move to interiority and the smaller scale of the mental backdrop is marked

²⁴ McGuckin 2008.

intellectually here in ways that also characterize much of Byzantine politics, architecture, and philosophy.

The Late Byzantine Church received the earlier patristic heritage into its hands and increasingly subordinated it to the concerns of the preservation of an increasingly dormant "Orthodox tradition." The maintenance of monastic piety gave high precedence to the ascetic concerns of the purification of the soul and the stilling of the mind in mystical prayer. These were trends that might well be seen as the "dimming twilight" of a once vibrant intellectual tradition, and they have customarily been seen in that light in contrast with the ascent of the medieval west's religious heritage in the same period at the beginning of the second millennium. But they were equally virtues that ensured, with the accelerating collapse of the eastern Roman territories and institutions before the advance of militant Islam, that the Byzantine intellectual tradition would survive. By going underground in such a way, the deep springs of its intellectual heritage survived in the hands of many generations of monastics who were no longer particularly educated but had a deep enough sense of reverence to preserve texts and traditions as sacred artifacts.

IV.1

PLATONIC THEMES

CHAPTER 18
THE BYZANTINE RECEPTION
OF NEOPLATONISM

TUOMO LANKILA

This chapter examines the foundations of the Byzantine reception of Neoplatonism and proposes that in Byzantium the Orthodox Christian worldview was more conformable to Middle Platonism than Neoplatonism. Christian Platonism in Byzantium, often described as the heir to Neoplatonism, was actually in a state of tension with it, even though the Byzantines received the legacy of Greek philosophy almost exclusively from texts used in pagan Neoplatonic schools. To elucidate this thesis we must draw a distinction between Middle and Later (“Neo”) Platonism to prepare the ground for discussing the relation between Neoplatonism and Christianity in Byzantium.¹

As a rule, the philosophy of the Middle Platonists revolved around the *Timaeus* and exemplified monotheistic leanings in theology. By contrast, the philosophy of the Neoplatonists shifted its hermeneutical focus from the *Timaeus* to the *Parmenides* and introduced henology, that is, the doctrine of the One, the absolute unitary root of being beyond Being. Thanks to henology, Neoplatonism was, and is, at least in the ancient western tradition of metaphysics, the only systematic philosophical attempt to advance beyond ontology (the philosophy of Being) in search of the more fundamental reality. To sharpen the picture, I will focus on the odyssey of Proklos’ *Platonic Theology*, a major Neoplatonic work that was copied and recopied in Byzantium, though rarely cited. This work managed to exercise its influence mainly indirectly, through the veiled intermediacy of Dionysios the Areopagite (c. 520), as the Dionysian corpus is a concentrated summary of Proklos’ chief work with a Christian surface.

DEFINING NEOPLATONISM

The authoritative volumes of *The Cambridge History of the Philosophy of Late Antiquity* deem the term “Neoplatonism” problematic as “an artifact of eighteenth-century German scholarship.”² We are reminded that it

¹ Following Trouillard 1972; 1973; 1982. ² Gerson 2010: 3.

contradicts the self-understanding of the Late Platonists, who did not claim to be innovators and called themselves simply Platonists. Worse still, this older academic usage is not only anachronistic, but pejorative as well, for initially “Neoplatonism” was taken to imply engagement with religious and magical practices, a pseudomorphosis of a presumably authentic Platonic philosophy. In order to accommodate the variety of different versions and strands of Platonic philosophy in late antiquity, the more neutral term “Late Platonism” now seems more palatable.

However, there are still good reasons to retain the term “Neoplatonism.” To start with, modern scholars of Neoplatonism freed themselves from its pejorative connotation a long time ago. Moreover, and oddly, those who are willing to abandon “Neoplatonism” nonetheless still employ the term “Middle Platonism” to signify the period between Plato’s Academy and Plotinos (d. 270), which means that the traditional starting point for “Neoplatonism,” i.e. the emergence of the Plotinian synthesis, is still implicitly taken to mark the birth of something new. Hence, the recognition that “Neoplatonists” called themselves simply Platonists has still not overridden the modern belief that something did change, nor should it. Our task is to try to understand them, even if that entails using heuristic terms not found in the ancient terminology.

Ostensible continuity often contained within it, and even masked, innovation. The late ancient ideal of interpretation was to refrain from adding anything to a presumed original doctrine and to focus on the correct interpretation of what the founders taught. Interestingly, this task of “correct” interpretation became itself an inevitable channel for innovation. Better explication and more intelligent exegesis opened ways to renewal and new proposals. In a similar way, the Church Fathers expanded and transformed the original teaching of the first Christians. Of course, with their Trinitarian and Christological doctrines they introduced radically new ideas, yet they thought they were only explicating the Scriptures. The relation of Middle and Late Platonists to Plato’s dialogues is analogous. The doctrine of the hypostases of the One, Intellect, and Soul was a daring innovation, and turned Platonic philosophy into metaphysical theology. Plato never explicitly identified the Idea of the Good or the One in the *Parmenides* with a primal God.

Thus within the Neoplatonic commentary tradition, Platonic exegesis acted as a means of injecting late Platonism with a doctrinal content that went well beyond the horizons of Plato’s Academy. Christian Wildberg makes an important point:

Today, we think of a commentary as a scholarly exercise that comprehensively informs the reader about the text commented on. In antiquity, however, philosophical commentaries were not in the first instance about texts, but about the

truth, enshrined as it was thought to be in the transmitted text of, say, Plato or Aristotle.³

The Neoplatonists thought that the whole of post-Academic Platonism, beginning with the skeptics, had “betrayed” Plato, and that the correct doctrine had been restored by Plotinos. Proklos (d. 485) came surprisingly close to the modern label of “Neoplatonism” when he employed the expression “all newer Platonists since Plotinos” (this was pointed out by Thomas Whittaker as early as 1918).⁴ The self-identification of these philosophers was based on the idea that they were vindicating true Platonism after its eclipse in the previous centuries. According to Proklos’ summary of the history of Platonism in the *Platonic Theology*, Plotinos marks the birth of that chorus of philosophers who read Plato’s *Parmenides* as the summit of metaphysical theology, the *Parmenides* containing in effect the essence of the whole of authentic Platonism. Thus Proklos defines “Neoplatonism” in its historical as well as doctrinal scope.⁵

If we take Proklos’ self-understanding seriously, it is easy to see that the proposed change of terms in modern research blurs important and real distinctions: “Late Platonism” and “Neoplatonism” are not interchangeable terms. The former is useful insofar as Platonism in late antiquity had practically absorbed all previous rival schools that had flourished since post-Hellenistic times. In this sense, Byzantine intellectuals inherited the generally Platonizing culture of late antiquity. But “Neoplatonism,” understood within the parameters defined by Proklos, is a fraction of general ancient “Late Platonism.” It had a more specific metaphysical orientation.

BYZANTINE “CHRISTIAN PLATONISM” AND MIDDLE PLATONISM

The best way to clarify the mutual interrelations of Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Orthodox Christian theology is to address two questions. The first concerns a particular question in the exegesis of Plato: Who is Plato’s demiurge? The second is the problem of monotheism and polytheism.

Christians in late antiquity and later the Byzantines granted an eminent place to the *Timaeus*, insofar as they equated Plato’s demiurge with their own supreme God. At this exegetical level it becomes apparent that, while Christianity and Platonism are generally incompatible on a number of

³ Wildberg 2005: 317.

⁴ Proklos, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* 2.88.12; see Whittaker 1961: 232.

⁵ Proklos’ list of the correct exegetes of Plato: *Platonic Theology* (henceforth *TP*) 1.6.16–1.7.9. On the primacy of the *Parmenides* among Plato’s dialogues: *TP* 1.31.7–1.32.12.

levels, Christianity is closer to the Middle Platonist position, for the Neoplatonists located the *Timaeus*' demiurgic god in the divine procession far "below" the ineffable One and the (independent, or *autoteleis*) henads (units), which were taken to be the real gods.⁶ According to Proklos' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, creation is divided into three stages: that of Zeus, which brings the hypercosmic diacosm into existence; that of Dionysos, which creates the cosmic-celestial diacosm; and, lastly, that of Adonis, which creates the sublunar realm. Thus, the highest demiurgic god in the *Timaeus* is dependent on the highest Zeus, who is the god of the *noeric* (intellective) level of the Neoplatonic system. This god the Neoplatonists thought was identified in *Parmenides* 146a–147b8. Above him, and below the One, are the henads, the gods of the noetic triads, the gods of the noetic–noeric triads, and the first and second of the three noeric triads. Thus the exegetical theology of Neoplatonism does not align with that of the Middle Platonists and Christians.

Neoplatonism is monistic insofar as it derives all reality from the one ineffable source. But this does not necessarily imply monotheism in theology, as is often assumed. Still, many late antique Christians read Plotinos in precisely such a way, as if he were supporting the doctrine of one unique God and even the belief in a personal and extra-mundane supreme godhead. According to Jean Trouillard, for example, Augustine's reading of Plotinos did not make him a Neoplatonist: "Augustine has not retained the philosophy issued from the *Parmenides*. A thinker is not a Neoplatonist if he has only been influenced by Neoplatonism, or even adopted some Neoplatonic theses, namely if he has not received and lived according to the fundamental intuition of that school."⁷ In his polemic against the Gnostics, after all, Plotinos emphasized that divinity is not to be restricted to a single being.⁸ In addition, his *Enneads* also contain speculations on the traditional gods (for example Zeus, Aphrodite, and Eros), which demonstrates that he took the gods of traditional religion seriously and did not see them as aspects of one exclusive godhead. Nor was the One for him a supreme Being or Being Itself, as is the case in Augustine's interpretation, whose view is in this respect more compatible with Middle Platonism.

Was, then, later Neoplatonism polytheistic? Not necessarily, if this term is understood as excluding the notion of a primary god. Undoubtedly many supporters of traditional religion depicted the gods simply as a group of supra-human sentient beings. To be sure, this was not the Neoplatonic

⁶ The fundamental texts for Proklos' theory of henads are *Elements of Theology*, props. 2, 6, 64, and 113–162, and *TP*, book 3. For modern research on the topic see especially the first chapter in the introduction to the latter work by Saffrey and Westerink 1978: ix–lxxxvii; and now the short introduction in Chlup 2012: 112–119.

⁷ Trouillard 1972: 9. ⁸ Plotinos, *Enneads* II, especially 2.9.9.35.

position. For the Neoplatonists, anthropomorphism was a mythological narrative, a necessary consequence of the human tendency to conceive of everything immaterial, invisible, and formless in material and visible terms.⁹ When Proklos says that “the God is one, the gods are many,”¹⁰ he is not subsuming many gods into aspects of the One *unique* God, for they are separately existing divinities, i.e. with identities of their own; nor is he effacing the primal God by reducing it into a multiplicity of other gods, or as the general characteristics of each god. Rather, he is speaking about gods as a *series* unfolding from one, primal source and necessarily present in every level of reality in its appropriate form.¹¹

This concept of serial procession also meant that Christian and Neoplatonic notions of transcendence were incommensurate. The former posits a rigid dividing line between an uncreated and a created level, whereas the latter sees reality as a continuum with stages and shades. Transcendence is for Proklos a relative concept (the intelligible transcends types of discursive reason; in their turn, they transcend sensible and enmattered forms, and so on). Although the One is seen as absolute principle, it nevertheless produces the universe through henads, which are its participable sphere, and it thereby guarantees the unity of reality. Thus the Neoplatonic world is non-dual and it is sacred, not as an image of one supreme God and made for human use, but as being full of gods at each of its levels.

THE PARADOX OF RECEPTION

As Peter Adamson put it in summarizing Richard Goulet’s findings,

of the nearly 11 million words of extant Greek philosophical texts now available in the *Thesaurus linguae Graecae*, about 58% were written by Neoplatonists and another 13% were written by [the Aristotelians] Alexander and Themistius. This means that much more than half of the directly extant Greek philosophical tradition consists in original works of Neoplatonists, Neoplatonist commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, and other late ancient commentaries on Aristotle.¹²

And yet when viewed from another angle, the Neoplatonic corpus did not manage to survive all that well. The fate of Proklos’ work is a good example of the odds that a pagan philosophical text would survive. Serving for almost fifty years at the head of the Neoplatonist school of Athens, Proklos was a prolific writer. Yet approximately only half of his writings have come

⁹ Proklos on divine epiphanies: *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* 1.39.5–40.5.

¹⁰ Proklos, *TP* 3.14.4.

¹¹ On Proklos’ theory of series in general, see *Elements of Theology*, props. 18–19; Lloyd 1990: 76–78.

¹² Adamson 2009: 80 on Goulet 2007.

down to us.¹³ Moreover, his massive commentaries on Plato do not survive intact. The copyists' fatigue at some point in the transmission history points to one possible reason for this state of affairs. But there are also reasons to suspect intentional destruction as another factor.¹⁴ Psellos was still able to use Proklos' huge *Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles*. The parts of that work that have reached us amount to only a few pages. Why did it disappear? Was Proklos' commentary intentionally abandoned to oblivion, or, worse still, destroyed by the hostility against Hellenizing intellectuals that set in after the mid-eleventh century?¹⁵

A good example of the precariousness and even randomness that marked the survival rates of a Neoplatonic text is the work of Damaskios, the last head of the Athenian school, who is now recognized as one of the major philosophical thinkers of late antiquity. Damaskios was known to Byzantines mainly as a writer of bizarre superstitious anecdotes, a controversial history of philosophers of his age, and as a commentator on two Platonic dialogues (the *Phaedo* and *Philebus*). His masterpieces, the *De principiis* and the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, survived thanks to a single manuscript (Marc. Gr. 246).¹⁶ Even if the *De principiis* was occasionally mentioned, there was no attempt to seriously engage with its contents or with Damaskios' commentary on the *Parmenides*.

Westerink's important article on the transmission of Platonism in Byzantium bears the intriguing title "Das Rätsel des untergründigen Neuplatonismus." But what is the "enigma of subterranean" Neoplatonism? Westerink points out that the Byzantines appear to have copied and preserved an enormous body of pagan Neoplatonic literature to which they do not draw attention, visible to us, until the eleventh century. But why did the Byzantines preserve the works of the later Neoplatonists, given that these contained elements of an antagonistic religious worldview? To begin with, they preserved them because of their own ambiguous position toward Greek philosophy. The inclusive tendency among those Christian intellectuals who were more tolerant of ancient philosophy stemmed from a utilitarian approach to philosophy that aimed at appropriating selective aspects. This view, originating with the Apologists and Clement of Alexandria, is well defined by John of Damascus, whose program when engaging with philosophy was to "set forth what is most

¹³ On the many lost Proklean works, including a commentary on Plotinos, Plato's *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, etc., see Reale 1989: 20–23.

¹⁴ On the transmission of the Hellenic heritage, see Lemerle 1986. On intentional destruction of books, see Speyer 1981.

¹⁵ See Chapters 16 and 27.

¹⁶ According to Westerink 1986: lxxvii, this collection from the third quarter of the ninth century may represent the remains of the library of the Neoplatonist school of Alexandria, transferred to Constantinople between the beginning of the sixth century and the middle of the ninth.

excellent among the wise men of the Greeks, knowing that anything that is true has been given to human beings from God, [and to] gather together what belongs to the truth and pick the fruits of salvation from the enemies, and reject everything that is evil and falsely called knowledge.”¹⁷ Philosophy was useful to the extent that it provided the conceptual means for Christians to sharpen and clarify their own discourse. These were needed for successful proselytism as well as for the battle against heresies. In a more positive sense, philosophy was useful in rendering doctrines that were already accepted by the faith more understandable through rational argumentation. Greek philosophy was also valued as a “secular” part of contemporary culture, though this required downplaying the religious significance of its concessions (and ontological commitments) to polytheism, or classifying philosophy as a preparation and anticipation of Christian revelation (under the ordering principle that “all truth belongs to Christians”). But in order to interpret the Hellenic literary heritage (e.g. Homer) as secular literature, Byzantine Christians were in need of tools, which included Neoplatonic hermeneutics. Thus, in an age when the general attitude toward Proklos was most hostile when it came to theology, the Byzantines could still regard him as a worthy exegete of ancient poetry.¹⁸

Theologically neutral aspects of Greek philosophy, such as logic, mathematics, and much of what we might call natural science were also available to the Byzantines through the works of Neoplatonic authors and their philosophical filters. The Byzantines acquired their basic knowledge of Aristotelean logic through Porphyry and the commentaries of Porphyry on him, even though Porphyry was in a different context considered to be the arch-enemy of Christianity. His explicit critique of Christian doctrines was cast into the flames, first by Constantine, and then again, and most effectively, by the edict of 448.¹⁹ But if the Byzantines copied Neoplatonic works deemed useful for literary criticism or for topics irrelevant to their religious confession, why then did they bother to copy a gigantic treatise of systematic pagan theology such as Proklos’ main work, the *Platonic Theology*? During the Dark Age extending from the late sixth century until the emergence of the so called “first Byzantine humanism,” Proklos’ *Platonic Theology* somehow survived. This is quite a puzzle given the negative or downright aggressive attitude of seventh-century Byzantines toward Proklos, as a poem by George of Pisidia (c. 634) testifies.²⁰

¹⁷ John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, prooimia 43–57; tr. Louth 2002: 31.

¹⁸ For Proklos’ commentary on Hesiod, its popularity, and survival, see Saffrey and Westerink 1997: lxxii.

¹⁹ Sokrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.9.30 (Constantine). The later law was issued by Theodosius II and Valentinian III on 16 February 448: *Justinianic Code* 1.1.3.

²⁰ George of Pisidia, *Hexaemeron* 60–65, 75–80.

One key for resolving this puzzle is the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, an enigmatic body of pseudonymous writings, composed between 475 and 528. Various theories have been offered to explain the motivation and identity of the author who posed as Dionysios, an Athenian who was allegedly converted to Christianity by the Apostle Paul.²¹ In the late 1960s, Ronald Hathaway counted twenty-two scholarly attempts to identify the author,²² and more have been proposed since. Dionysios' authenticity was challenged already in 532 in discussions relating to the miaphysite controversy, by the bishop Hypatios of Ephesos, and also by other unknown people with whose arguments a certain presbyter named Theodore tried to cope.²³ Still, "Dionysios" managed to become one of the seminal figures of Byzantine theology. With the acceptance of the corpus as a quasi-apostolic text, the inverted plagiarism explanation was also adopted, according to which it was Proklos who had appropriated an early Christian source!²⁴ Thus, though Proklos' *Platonic Theology* does not appear to have had a direct impact upon any important Christian thinkers known to us before the late Byzantine period, it nevertheless exercised an enormous influence through the mediation of Dionysios. The only late antique author known to us besides him and Damaskios to directly refer to the *Platonic Theology* is John Lydos, whose knowledge of Proklos' work was quite extensive, owing to his year-long studies under Agapios, Proklos' youngest direct pupil.²⁵

There is a trend in recent scholarship to downplay by all means pseudo-Dionysios' dependency upon Proklos. A widespread view is that his relation to Neoplatonic philosophy is overrated, in comparison, that is, to his own original thoughts and patristic concerns.²⁶ But this does not seem to be the case, especially if we take into account the overwhelming presence of Proklos in pseudo-Dionysios. According to the observations of Beata Regina Suchla, pseudo-Dionysios directly or indirectly refers to Proklos 722 times out of more than 1,100 cases of references to Plato and Platonism in general.²⁷ As Saffrey puts it, "Proklos' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* and his *Platonic Theology* are the background to the whole work of Dionysios . . . [which] is inspired by the organization and plan of *Platonic Theology*. Numerous borrowings in vocabulary and doctrinal

²¹ Acts 17:16–34. ²² Hathaway 1969: 31–36. ²³ Photios, *Bibliothēke* 1.1a13–1.2a16.

²⁴ See the famous scholia preserved in the commentary on the Dionysian corpus by John of Scythopolis, which are probably older than John's own notes: in *PG* 4:21–23.

²⁵ Direct references in Damaskios, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1.55.16–21, 1.81.14–19, 2.48.21–24; Lydos refers ten times to Proklos, and at least his *On the Months* 1.15 (pp. 8–9) is based on the *Platonic Theology*; see Saffrey and Westerink 1997: xxx–xxxiii.

²⁶ See, among the most recent contributions, Stang 2009; and Schäfer 2008, who (170) calls scholars emphasizing the Proklean origin of the corpus "proverbial fools." Suchla 2008: 60 refutes Schäfer.

²⁷ Suchla 2008: 34, 59.

elements are identified, which make this an indubitable fact.”²⁸ Following Suchla, I would say that Dionysios’ *On Divine Names* reflects or – let us put it even more strongly – derives from the first books (1–2) of the *Platonic Theology* (including Proklos’ *De malorum subsistentia*, or *On the Existence of Evil*), whereas his *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* are summaries of books 3–6 of the *Platonic Theology*, while the *Mystical Theology* rather echoes Damaskios.²⁹

Since the time of presbyter Theodore, Dionysios’ priority to Proklos had never been challenged in Byzantium, while the *Platonic Theology* was customarily neglected by both “Hellenizers” and their adversaries. Thus Nicholas of Methone tried to refute the *Elements of Theology*,³⁰ but his work does not indicate that he had actually read or even was aware of the existence of Proklos’ *magnum opus*, that is, the *Platonic Theology*. We know at least that among the great intellectual luminaries of Byzantium George Pachymeres directly engaged with the *Platonic Theology*.³¹ Nevertheless he was driven to do so by a desire to understand and better explain Dionysios, rather than Proklos himself. It could hardly be otherwise: Psellos’ cautious attempt at a recuperation of Neoplatonism turned immediately to a scandal and the condemnation of his successors, a fate that Psellos himself narrowly avoided. Like their early predecessor, Leo the Philosopher (or Mathematician, d. c. 870),³² the great Byzantine enthusiasts of Proklos, Psellos and Italos, were suspected of being Hellenizers (that is, cryptopagans). Levan Gigineishvili and Gerd Van Riel are of the opinion that Psellos and Italos never cite or refer to the *Platonic Theology*, but, based on the works of the Georgian scholar Ioane Petritsi, who was possibly a pupil of Psellos and perhaps of Italos too, they think that Psellos’ circle knew the *Platonic Theology* and Proklos’ *Commentary on Parmenides* as well. Be that as it may, Psellos identified himself as a Christian and adopted the inverted plagiarism thesis, according to which Proklos copied Dionysios.³³ According to Frederick Lauritzen, “Psellos did not limit himself to collecting the texts of Dionysios, he also used them to justify his interest in the Neoplatonist Proklos, whom he found similar to the Church Fathers (just as the *Souda* has done).”³⁴ Gigineishvili and Van Riel describe the difference between Psellos’ and Petritsi’s attitudes to Proklos: the latter “lacks altogether Psellos’ reservedness and embraces

²⁸ Saffrey and Westerink 1997: li (my translation). ²⁹ Suchla 2008: 59; Perczel 2000: 491–532.

³⁰ Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proklos*. ³¹ Saffrey and Westerink 1997: lxxviii.

³² On Leo the Mathematician, see Lemerle 1986: 171–204. Lauritzen (2012) argues for Proklos’ direct influence on Maximos the Confessor. He points out that Maximos employed Proklos’ technical term “self-constituted,” which never appears in pseudo-Dionysios. However, the term is common in Porphyry and late ancient commentators of Aristotle, and especially frequently used by Philoponos.

³³ See for example Psellos, *Philosophica Minora*, v. 2, 35 (p. 119). ³⁴ Lauritzen 2013: 211.

Neoplatonic theology with an almost childish reliance and enthusiasm.”³⁵

The so-called “Great Fragment,”³⁶ dating probably from the thirteenth century, confirms an interest in Proklos inspired by Christian concerns and refracted through the lens of monotheism. The unknown compiler confines his task to the first books of *Platonic Theology*, the first of which deals with theology and the general attributes of divinity, while the second contains Proklos’ theory of the One as the primal God. But the Christian compiler disregards the third book, which has special interest for the modern study of Proklos precisely because of its exposition of the theory of henads as well as the rest of the work that deals with the procession of the gods.

The historical significance of the *Corpus Areopagiticus* for the preservation of many Neoplatonic texts, ideas, and themes cannot be overstated. The author of the corpus successfully created the impression that Proklos was highly relevant to Christian concerns. Is this a seminal work of Christian adaptation of Proklos, or a clever cryptopagan plot? I am convinced that the most probable environment which enabled the creation of the corpus was the Athenian Academy under Damaskios, and have elsewhere argued that Theodora of Emesa may have been the author of the corpus.³⁷ As this pupil and colleague of Damaskios was known to be a staunch defender of traditional religion, one in the line of “first prize winners in idolatrous impiety,” as Photios put it, the hypothesis of her authorship also implies that the main motive of the work was the preservation of Proklos’ legacy. In any case, one of the greatest paradoxes in the intellectual history of Byzantium is that the author deemed as the father of Orthodox mysticism and apophatism actually helped to preserve for posterity the culmination and great *summa* of late ancient pagan theology.

A REMINDER: NEOPLATONISM DID NOT DIE A NATURAL DEATH

To properly contextualize late Neoplatonism in the intellectual scene of Byzantium, it is important to keep in mind that as a philosophical movement it did not die a natural death. This point was perfectly obvious to previous scholarship, while today it oddly and frustratingly needs to be reestablished as if it were some novel (or outdated) interpretative thesis. The reason for this is that during the last decades it has been customary among scholars to exercise an “irenic approach” in order to explain (away) real conflicts between antagonistic currents of thought in the late Roman and early Byzantine period. It seems that older scholarship, which insisted upon the reality of conflict, oppression, and persecution in late antiquity

³⁵ Gigineishvili and Van Riel 2000: 572. ³⁶ Steel and Van Riel 2000: 550–551. ³⁷ Lankila 2011.

and Byzantium, is now often completely discredited through dubious arguments against those supposedly “earlier scholars with a romantic view of ‘good’ paganism against ‘bad, repressive’ Christianity.”³⁸

Polymnia Athanassiadi points out that there was a tendency toward intolerance, internal repression, and the desire to build up “orthodoxy” even among the Neoplatonic schools.³⁹ There is truth in this, but, as John Dillon puts it, Neoplatonists never had any “regulating structure or hierarchy of accredited teachers, such as Christianity so quickly built up for itself.”⁴⁰ Nor did the Neoplatonists ever take up the aggressive tone typical of discussion between contending Christological parties, far less did they turn to physical and legal violence. Most importantly, the Neoplatonists were unable, nor did they even attempt, to gain the support of any repressive secular power in order to resolve their theoretical disagreements.

In the last forty years, the study of late antiquity has benefited from some refreshing ideas originating from postmodern insights, but this has resulted in a relativism that sometimes ideologically abuses history. The currently fashionable tendency to emphasize the common values and continuities rather than the ruptures prevents us from understanding historically attested conflicts. The *en vogue* jargon of “negotiating” and “renegotiating” identities overlooks the role of violence and repression. Regardless of whether one feels that late ancient pagans were “good” or “bad,” in any case they were obvious victims and constant targets of an intentional and ideologically driven repression exercised by an emerging force in history: the Byzantine complex of clerical and political authority. That Byzantine legislation had to repeatedly restate its intention to suppress dissent hardly means that this intention was not taken seriously; rather, that like every premodern state it still simply lacked the means to enforce its will fully. Neoplatonism survived, and probably never lacked readers, even in Byzantium.

³⁸ MacCoull 2010: 69. ³⁹ Athanassiadi 2010. ⁴⁰ Dillon 1983: 60–75.

CHAPTER 19

PLATONISM FROM MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR TO THE PALAIOLOGAN PERIOD

ANDREW LOUTH

INTRODUCTION

Platonism in the Byzantine intellectual world is omnipresent: even among those who would reject it, or attack it, we find a pervasive influence of ideas that can be traced back to Plato. We need, therefore, to distinguish two senses, or at least two layers, in the notion of Platonism. There is, first, a general, diffused Platonism, by which I mean the kind of Platonic notions that became part of the intellectual equipment of virtually any thinking Greek Christian, not just in the Byzantine period. Secondly, there is a more defined notion of Platonism; those who adhered to this would call themselves “Platonists.”

The notions found in the former kind of Platonism include a belief in two worlds, one perceived by the senses, the other perceived by the intellect (the material and spiritual worlds); a sense that everything finds its source in a supreme being, God, and that everything that exists is, in some way, an expression of God’s will and intention, which can often be seen as a development of Plato’s doctrine of the Forms or Ideas, in the form found among the Middle Platonists, where the Ideas are in fact ideas in the mind of God; furthermore, indeed an aspect of the latter, a notion that the cosmos and everything in it is ruled by God’s providence; the idea that God and everything he has created is good; a conviction that the human is more than the two-legged animal we observe, but is really an invisible soul which, in principle, governs its body; a further conviction that the purpose of the soul is to come to behold God in an act of contemplation, something for which the body is often a distraction; a more detailed understanding of the notion of the soul, consisting of both an irrational and a rational part, the latter being the intellect, or *nous*, which alone is properly capable of contemplation of the divine, the former being divided into two parts, desire and a more aggressive part, which can manifest itself in anger, and is the source of the soul’s energy (this latter called the “spirited” or “incensive” part) – the soul is, therefore, tripartite; a sense that a human being is responsible for his actions and expects after death to undergo judgment. We could sum up this bundle of Platonic ideas by saying that

the universe is seen as a moral universe, which has meaning and purpose, though it may only be human beings who can perceive this; furthermore, in the universe, the two worlds, the material and the spiritual, though distinct are intimately related: visible symbols in the material world point to the invisible world, while the invisible world finds expression within the material world.

All these notions are found in the more strictly defined Platonism, but these Platonists saw in Plato an authoritative text: they justified their tenets by reference to the Platonic dialogues; whereas Christians, adhering to the more diffused Platonism, rarely, if ever, granted Plato any authority, but justified their beliefs by reference to the Christian Scriptures; so they read the Creation account in Genesis 1–2 in the light of the creation myth in Plato's *Timaeus*. In addition, in self-confessed Platonism, there are various characteristic doctrines: a conviction that the universe is eternal, even though eternally dependent on the supreme being, and, following on from this, a denial that the universe was created by God out of nothing (which came to be the standard way of relating the universe to God among Christian "Platonists"); also that the soul, or at least the intellect, is eternal, entailing belief in its preexistence and thus the doctrine of transmigration of souls or metempsychosis. Both these tenets suggest an understanding of the universe which sees some kind of continuum from the highest being to the lowest: from the third century onwards, first of all with Plotinos, this was expressed by thinking of everything as proceeding from the One and seeking to return there, so that there is a cyclical process of rest–procession–return (μονή–πρόοδος–ἐπιστροφή / *monē–proodos–epistrophe*) underlying all reality. Few, if any, of those who upheld this more defined Platonism were Christians, and from the third century onwards these were mostly consciously opposed to Christianity, expounding through their Platonism an explicitly non-Christian understanding of reality and using their philosophy to support the practices of traditional paganism; it was in some such terms that the emperor Julian the "Apostate" sought to restore paganism during his short reign in the mid-fourth century. As with Plato, the term θεός (*theos*), god, applied to immortal beings, in contrast to mortal humans; it was rarely, if ever, used of the highest being, the One, but was instead reserved for the host of divinities found in pagan mythology, and identified with those beings closer to the One than humans, who though possessing immortal souls experienced death, and were therefore mortal.

This developed Platonism, called by modern scholars Neoplatonism, attained, from the third century onwards, a high degree of intellectual sophistication and entranced many Christian intellectuals, who sought to reconcile this splendid intellectual system with their Christian beliefs, especially creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, and the conviction that the soul is created with the body, rather than being preexistent, not to mention the

central Christian belief in the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. There were many Christians who attempted this reconciliation, notably Origen in the third century and most of the best Christian thinkers in the succeeding centuries: the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Gregory of Nazianzos (the “Theologian”) and Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret of Kyrrhos, Maximos the Confessor, and many others. Perhaps the most influential Christian “Neoplatonist” was the author of a body of short treatises and letters, that emerged in the sixth century, claiming the authorship of Dionysios the Areopagite, the Apostle Paul’s convert in Athens (see Acts 17).

A further preliminary point: it is virtually an abiding characteristic of the history of western philosophy to make some kind of contrast between Plato and his greatest disciple, Aristotle. At the beginning of the period of this volume there was a series of commentators on Aristotle, from Alexander of Aphrodisias, via Porphyry, to the Aristotelian commentators of the sixth century, ending in the early seventh century with Stephanos.¹ The importance of the influence of Aristotle has been argued to be one of the features of the passage into late antiquity (or from late antiquity into the Middle Ages).² The contrast between Plato and Aristotle is quite difficult to articulate for most of our period, as Aristotle was interpreted by most of the commentators as being essentially in agreement with Plato (in contrast to Plotinos who tended to be critical of Aristotle).³ When appropriate, the question of “Aristotelianism” will be mentioned, but this caveat must be borne in mind.

There are then two histories to be related, or at least considered, in this chapter: that of “diffused” Platonism among Christian thinkers, and that of formal Platonism, or Neoplatonism. The two threads get tangled, and I am not sure that they can be disentangled at all. There are, however, occasions when there is condemnation of thinkers for their alleged “Platonism” and also of thinkers who claimed to be Platonists, declaring their allegiance to Plato and his followers, notably the third-century Plotinos and the fifth-century Proklos, who held the position of *diadochos*, or successor (to Plato), in the academy in Athens. Nevertheless, this chapter will follow a chronological line, switching back and forth from “diffused” to self-conscious Platonism.

MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

Maximos the Confessor (580–662) was, by common consent, the greatest of the Byzantine theologians. Until the last century, he was mostly known for his defense of Christological Orthodoxy, for which he suffered trial,

¹ Sorabji 2005, and the series of translations of the commentators, ed. by Sorabji.

² Fowden 2014: 127–163. ³ Karamanolis 2006.

mutilation, and banishment, gaining the title “Confessor.” Now he is as well known, if not better, for the profound interweaving of dogmatic theology, philosophical analysis, the Liturgy, and the ascetic and mystical theology of Byzantine monasticism in his theological vision. He opposed the lingering Origenism found among some of the more thoughtful Byzantine monks, refuting it “with a full understanding and will to retain what was good in the Alexandrian’s doctrine – a refutation perhaps unique in Greek patristic literature,”⁴ so fair indeed that his opponents dubbed him an Origenist!⁵ Opposition to Origenism was due to the conviction that Origen’s thought was too deeply Platonic, and thus foreshadows the condemnation of Platonism found later on in Byzantium, though Origen did not regard himself as a Platonist, nor did Platonists contemporary with him.⁶ It is perhaps not without significance that the imperial condemnation of Origenism secured by the emperor Justinian, confirmed at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, took place barely twenty-five years after the closure of the Platonic Academy in Athens by the same emperor. Maximos’ thought, especially his account of human psychology, shows the influence of Aristotle, though it is most likely that this is due to his dependence on (and perhaps rediscovery of) Nemesios of Emesa’s *De natura hominis*, rather than any direct acquaintance with Aristotle or his commentators. His account of human psychology, which he employs in his ascetical works, is fundamentally Platonic with Aristotelian elaborations.⁷

Maximos’ most important contribution to the Platonic tradition is his elaboration of the doctrine of the *logoi* of creation, or *logoi* of being (λόγοι τῆς οὐσίας / *logoi tes ousias*), combined with his notion of the modes of existence (τρόποι τῆς ὑπάρξεως / *tropoi tes hyparkseos*). Maximos takes the traditional notion of creation through the Word, or *Logos*, of God, and develops the idea that, included in the *Logos*, are a multitude of *logoi* that define the nature of each individual being (and indeed, each universal being: *Ambigua* 7 in *PG* 91:1080A). In some way, Maximos’ doctrine of the *logoi* is a development of Plato’s theory of Forms or Ideas, though by no means directly; to Maximos’ mind it is a way of expressing the unity-in-diversity and diversity-in-unity of the created order.⁸ The *logoi* express God’s providential will for each of the creatures, and with this in mind Maximos cites Dionysios the Areopagite, who calls the *logoi* “paradigms,” “predeterminations,” and “divine wills” (*Divine Names* 5.7 in *PG* 3:824C). Creatures exist in accordance with their *logos* of being. In the case of rational creatures (human beings, but also angels and demons), it is

⁴ Sherwood 1952: 3. ⁵ Louth 1996: 6. ⁶ Edwards 2002.

⁷ The role of philosophy in his ascetical and mystical writings is discussed in Chapter 30.

⁸ On what follows, see Louth 2010: 77–84.

possible to pursue an action or course of life that runs against the grain of one's being, one's *logos*.

To account for this, Maximos introduces the notion of the mode of existence. The notion of τρόπος τῆς ὑπόρξεως had first been used by the Cappadocian Fathers to express the way in which the persons of the Trinity are distinct from each other while remaining one God: at the level of being, οὐσία / *ousia*, they are one, they have a single *logos* of being; at the level of existence, they have different modes, *tropoi*. Maximos uses this distinction with meticulous care, as when he develops his doctrine of the Trinity (see e.g. *Amb.* 1:1033D–1036C). Maximos, however (and in this he seems original), begins to use the distinction *logos* of being / *tropos* of existence in relation to rational creatures, who because of their free will, while they cannot distort the *logos* of being itself (that would be to become a different nature), can fail to align their *tropos* of existence with their *logos* of being. As a result of the Fall, this has become the universal human condition, and the human ascetic task is to bring the *tropos* of existence once more into alignment with the *logos* of being: something beyond human power alone, requiring the grace of the Word Incarnate (see, especially, *Amb.* 41:1304D–1316A). This doctrine of the *logoi* of being, although proleptic forms of it can be found in Plotinos and Evagrius, has been called “the Confessor’s signature doctrine,”⁹ but it seems to have been too difficult (too philosophical?) for his followers. It emerges again only in the thought of Isaac the Sebastokrator in the eleventh century and in Barlaam the Calabrian in the fourteenth (see below).

JOHN OF DAMASCUS AND ICONOCLASM

Maximos belonged to a period that saw the dramatic reconfiguration of the Mediterranean world as a result of the Arab conquest of the eastern and southern provinces of the Byzantine empire. John of Damascus belonged to the ensuing world: he was born in Damascus in the third quarter of the seventh century, by which time it was the capital of the Umayyad empire. Although he seems to have thought of himself as Byzantine (or Roman), he spent the whole of his life in the Arab empire, first in Damascus and then, from the beginning of the eighth century, in (or maybe near) Jerusalem, where he became a monk. In this changed political situation, the Christianity of the imperial Councils became one religion of the book among many, and John is to be seen as part of a long process whereby Byzantine “Orthodoxy” was clarified and defended against various heretical forms of Christianity, not to mention Judaism and Islam. John is unlikely to have been the only person engaged in this endeavor, but he is

⁹ Simonopetrites 2013: 45.

the best known. To help other Christians defend Orthodoxy, he prepared a Christian textbook of logic, his *Dialectica*, with which he prefaced his century of chapters *De fide orthodoxa*. It is likely that later he sought to expand this textbook, in its original form a half-century, to a full century, which would have prefaced his tripartite work, *The Fount of Knowledge* (*Πηγή τῆς Γνώσεως / Pege tes gnoseos*), but this was never finished. In compiling such a textbook of logic, John was participating in an already existing tradition, though the other examples of such textbooks survive mostly in manuscripts.¹⁰ John's textbook, and the others, are dependent on Aristotle's treatises on logic and their commentators. The dependence could be direct, but whether it is or not, John can hardly be regarded as advancing Aristotelian commentary; he is simplifying and summarizing in what is essentially an elementary textbook.

In his presentation of Orthodox Christianity in his *De fide*, and his other polemical treatises (directed against what he regarded as heresy, including Islam), and indeed in his homilies and liturgical poetry (where he is an important innovator), John draws on the acknowledged Fathers of the Church. There is little here of specifically philosophical importance, though it should be noted that he devotes a good deal of space in his *De fide* to cosmology and psychology, in which he draws on traditional sources, both Christian and non-Christian (Nemesios is an important quarry for philosophical ideas, especially in relation to psychology and providence; as he had been for Maximos). In one area, however, he develops a coherent and significant body of reflection, and that is in relation to the notion of the image, εἰκῶν (*eikon*). This is found mostly in the treatises that he wrote against the Iconoclasts, though the relevant chapter in *De fide* (89) marshals a concise and distinctive case: whether this predates the Iconoclast controversy, or reflects it, is difficult to say.

John's theory of icons was, at least in its developed form, conceived in opposition to Iconoclasm, which, according to the traditional view (which has been challenged), began in 726 or 730 in the reign of Leo III and lasted until the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy in 842, with an intermission during which the veneration of icons was restored from 776 to 815. The intellectual motives behind Iconoclasm are difficult to discern, as the writings of the Iconoclasts are preserved only in fragments, quoted by the Orthodox in their refutation of them. It has been argued, notably by Fr. Georges Florovsky, that Iconoclasm was Origenist in inspiration, in which case Iconoclasm could be seen as a recrudescence, if not of self-conscious Platonism, of a more determined Platonism than was customary. Florovsky's view, in my opinion, is not very likely, though it is still invoked. Iconoclast theology certainly turned on the nature of the image

¹⁰ Roueché 1974, and other articles by this author.

and seems, at least in the first stage of the controversy, to have involved a belief that the image could be a true image only if it was in some way identical with the original. This does not sound very Platonic; it would undermine any developed symbolism. It is, anyway, commonly agreed that the motives behind Iconoclasm were political, rather than intellectual. In the second period of Iconoclasm, its chief proponent was a scholar, John the Grammarian, who became patriarch of Constantinople in the last years of Iconoclasm (837–843). In his time, and very likely connected with him, there was a revival of learning in Constantinople, but it is not clear what this implies about the intellectual roots of later Iconoclasm.

In his treatise against the Iconoclasts and its two revisions (as we should think of them, rather than three treatises),¹¹ John essays a developed theory of the icon, or image, backing it up and illustrating it with patristic florilegia. The making of icons and their veneration rests for John on two principles: first, what one might call the architectonic significance of the image in the created order, and secondly, the Incarnation, in which the divine source of everything including images, being himself beyond image, nevertheless takes on a form, the human form, of which there can be images: in the Incarnation, as Maximos put it, the Lord “became a type and symbol of Himself” (*Amb.* 10 in *PG* 91:1165D). Corresponding to this far-reaching concept of the image, there is the notion of veneration; as the image bodies forth a higher reality, so it calls forth a response of veneration: acknowledgment, acceptance, and devotion. What is central is John’s analysis of the significance of image. An image is “a likeness and paradigm and expression of something, showing in itself what is depicted in the image”; it is never completely like its model, otherwise there would be identity (*Imag.* 3.16). The purpose of an image is “the manifestation and display of the hidden,” hidden either because it is invisible, or because it is not present, whether in place or time: the image leads us to this hidden reality (*Imag.* 3.17). The heart of John’s exposition turns on the different meanings of the word “image.” He distinguishes six meanings: first, the natural image, as a son is an image of the father (and more particularly, as the Son of God is the image of God the Father); second, the images or paradigms (or predeterminations, as we saw that Dionysios called them) within God of what is to be; third, human kind as created in the image of God, manifest both in the Trinitarian structure of the human soul as intellect, reason, and spirit, and in human free will and human rule over the rest of creation; fourth, there are images that use bodily forms to represent the spiritual world, necessary for human beings, composed of body and soul, if they are to form some conception of the spiritual; fifth, there are images in the Old Testament that prefigure the realities of the

¹¹ Louth 2003: 7–17.

New (the burning bush as a figure of the virginity of the Mother of God, or water as a figure of baptism); finally, there are images that recall the past, either in written form or in pictures (*Imag.* 3.18–23).

This is not just a list, it is an evocation of the multitude of ways in which images establish relationships among realities: within the Trinity; between God and the providential ordering of the universe; between God and the inner reality of the human soul; between visible and invisible; between the past and the future; between the present and the past. The notion of image, in its different forms, is always mediating, always holding together in harmony. Images in the form of pictorial icons fit into this pattern, in a quite humble way, but to deny the icon is to threaten the whole fabric of harmony and mediation based on the image. At the heart of all this is human kind as the image of God: the image of God in the human is the microcosm, the little universe, the bond of the cosmos. This world of signs was created by God, who first made images when he created human kind in his image and manifested himself in the Old Testament in theophanies that took the form of images: Adam hearing the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Jacob fighting with God, Moses seeing God's behind, Isaiah seeing him as a man seated on a throne, Daniel seeing the likeness of man and as Son of man, coming to the Ancient of Days, all of which prefigure the fundamental entry of God into the world of signs or images in the Incarnation (*Imag.* 3.26). Furthermore, creating human kind in his image, he created him to make images.

In the writings of Dionysios the Areopagite, John finds authority for this idea of a world of mutually reflecting reality, in which signs and images trace its interrelationships and are the means by which human kind, which is both spiritual and bodily, moves through material reality to grasp invisible, spiritual reality. The florilegium to the third treatise begins with a passage from *ep.* 10: "Truly visible things are manifest images of things invisible" (*Imag.* 3.43). On this principle he develops an elaborate theory of symbolism, as we have seen, with Platonic foundations, maybe richer than anything found elsewhere in Platonism, as the Christian understanding of God's οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) in his created world enables him to develop a highly textured sense of the reach of symbolic reference.

John also cites several times (though not in his florilegia) a passage from Gregory the Theologian's second *Theological Oration*, in which Gregory says that the intellect, tiring of attempting to get beyond the material, either falls into idolatry or treats material things as signs and symbols pointing beyond them to God (*Or.* 28.13). This leads him to adopt a positive attitude toward the imagination, something unusual in the Platonic tradition, and positively astonishing in the Byzantine ascetic tradition; for it is the imagination that receives images in the human

mind (1.11). This appreciation of the imagination remained part of iconophile theology. In one of his letters, Theodore of Stoudios includes a defense of the imagination as part of his defense of images. “To speak Dionysiacy (*Dionysiakos eipein*),” he says, it is by images that we “ascend to intellectual contemplations,” affirming that “imagination is then one of the five faculties of the soul, and imagination itself seems to be a kind of image; for they are both manifestations” (*Ep.* 380). Ultimately, for both John and Theodore, defense of the icons entailed an acknowledgment of the integrity of embodied human nature.

This defense of symbolism and the imagination is perhaps the most important contribution of iconophile theology to the “diffused Platonism” of the Church Fathers.

FIRST BYZANTINE HUMANISM

After Iconoclasm, and likely during its last stages, Byzantine intellectual culture experienced a renaissance. The details, and indeed the institutional expression of this, are not at all clear.¹² Somewhat clearer is the learning of some exponents of this renaissance. Photios, for instance, was a scholar of immense learning, as is manifest from his series of what have been called “book reviews,” the *Myriobiblion* or *Bibliotheke*. His learning, especially in classical writers, was the cause of envy, even hostility.¹³ It is, however, exceptionally difficult to get a grip on Photios’ thought, as opposed to his learning. In his *Amphilochia*, a series of letters presented as responses to questions put to him by a certain Amphilochios, metropolitan of Kyzikos, we encounter Photios the theologian. He falls into a recognizable Byzantine tradition, not the tradition of ascetical or mystical theology, often assumed to be the sole genre of theology after Iconoclasm, but the theology of scholarly commentary on Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, especially Gregory the Theologian. We first find this tradition in Maximos the Confessor, and it continued throughout the Byzantine period. It was an essentially lay tradition, even though Photios became patriarch.¹⁴ How, in particular, Photios relates to the Platonic tradition is difficult to say: none of Plato’s dialogues is included in the works reviewed in the *Bibliotheke* (nor any of Aristotle’s), which may not be surprising, as there is nothing systematic about the works surveyed there. Nevertheless, it is evident from his remarks in the *Bibliotheke* and in the *Amphilochia* that he was well acquainted with the works of Plato, that he knew something

¹² Lemerle 1971.

¹³ See especially the *Vita Ignatii* 21, in Smithies 2013: 32–36, an exceptionally hostile source.

¹⁴ Louth 2006.

about Plotinos, and knew a good deal about Proklos; little of this information seems to betray any serious philosophical interests.

Rather different is the case of Leo Choïrosphaktes, born in the mid-ninth century, a high-ranking court official and diplomat, related to Zoe Karbonopsina, the fourth wife of Leo VI “the Wise.” Involved in intrigue against the emperor, he was eventually tonsured and confined to the Stoudios monastery, where he died. Apart from letters, most of his writings are in verse: epigrams, possibly an *ekphrasis* on the hot springs of Pythia in Bithynia, and religious verse including a *kontakion*. Of particular interest is his *Theological Poem* or *Chilostichos Theologia*, “Theology in a Thousand Verses,” in fact rather more, though several have been lost. This is a work of didactic *theologia* in the strict sense of the word, about the nature of God, One, and Three (there is no real treatment of God’s *oikonomia*) and was of deeply Platonic inspiration, beginning by treating God as the One, arguing against pagan and heretical views of the origin of the universe, presenting an argument for the existence of God from the nature of the cosmos, and finally returning to treat God as Trinity. His principal sources are Gregory the Theologian, Dionysios the Areopagite, and John of Damascus, but there are plenty of echoes of Plato and Plotinos, and a few of Proklos. The overwhelming impression is of a treatment of what the Byzantines called the “inner wisdom” (the faith of the Church based on the Scriptures) using the resources of the “outer wisdom” (the classical philosophical tradition). Much of it is reminiscent of Synesios of Cyrene, of whom Leo seems unaware. It was attacked by Arethas, bishop of Caesarea (c. 850–c. 940) as “Hellenic”, i.e. pagan.¹⁵

MICHAEL PSELLOS AND JOHN ITALOS

When we reach the eleventh century, we find renewed recourse to Platonism and Neoplatonism. This is mostly associated with the name of Michael Psellos, who presents himself as rediscovering this tradition single-handedly: the study of philosophy, he asserts, “was moribund so far as its professors were concerned, and I alone revived it, untutored by any masters worthy of name.”¹⁶ As Psellos is treated in Chapter 26, we can be brief. Psellos presents himself as learned, but is careful to distance himself from explicit endorsement of the Platonic tradition. He claims, for instance, knowledge of astrology and horoscopy, but disclaims any personal belief in such practices. Most scholars regard Psellos as dissembling, so as to avoid censure, and they may well be right. Even if Psellos is being straightforward in these disclaimers, there is no doubt of his admiration for the great thinkers of the Platonic tradition, such as Plato, Plotinos, and Proklos.

¹⁵ Magdalino 1997a. ¹⁶ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.37.

Whatever he himself thought, his enthusiasm for these great thinkers, which made their works available in the eleventh century, through having their works copied, and through his own exposition of them, opened the way to a new engagement with the Platonic tradition in the Byzantine world.

Many of Psellos' writings are theological – apart from the two volumes in the new Teubner edition, some of the material in the other volumes (notably his didactic verse) addresses theological issues – so it can hardly be maintained that he had no interest in theology, but it was not Psellos who was to pioneer a new engagement with the Platonic tradition. His interest was in the line of Photios – learned commentary on theological difficulties – but what we tend to find is the clarification of some point leading into a display of his vast learning in the Platonic tradition. His attitude toward Maximos is symptomatic: he knows him well, making good use of *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* and the *Ambigua*, as well as the *Expositio in psalmum LIX*, but, rather than developing his ideas, he tends to trace the sources of the Confessor's thought in the Platonic tradition, which he knows so much better than did the Confessor himself. It is revealing that, in an aside, Psellos speaks disparagingly of Maximos, expressing his preference for Plato.¹⁷ Psellos' gifts perhaps lay more with rhetoric, the Romanian scholar Nicolae Iorga once remarking that “Psellos forged a new language, of long and noble phrases, a language which is by turns moving and delicate, laden with words long forgotten, words with imposing resonance, which he knew how to use with erudite pretension, as if they were part of his everyday speech.”¹⁸

There can be no doubt that Psellos found himself under attack for his supposedly too deep involvement in the Platonic tradition. The very defensiveness with which he speaks of his Platonic and pagan learning in the *Chronographia* seems eloquent enough testimony of this. His pupil John Italos, who succeeded Psellos as “Consul of the Philosophers”, was not so fortunate. It is not clear whether he was more extreme than Psellos in embracing non-Christian Hellenism, or more reckless in expressing his views, or more vulnerable (for more detail, see Chapter 23), but whereas Psellos escaped explicit condemnation, Italos provided an opportunity for the new emperor, Alexios I Komnenos, to demonstrate his Orthodox credentials (already severely damaged by his seizure of monastic treasures to supply his military needs) by a heresy trial in which Italos was condemned. The condemnation was summarized in a collection of anathemas that were added to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, originally issued in 843 at the end of Iconoclasm. This initiated the use of the *Synodikon* as an

¹⁷ Simonopetrites 2013: 40, quoting *Theologica minora*, v. 1, 78.107–117 (p. 316); 79.73–78 (p. 319).

¹⁸ Quoted by Tatakis 2001: 132.

instrument of imperial ecclesiastical policy, to be further used by later Komnenoi emperors and in the fourteenth-century Hesychast controversy.

The eleven anathemas addressed against Italos censure him for introducing human logic into attempts to understand the nature of the Incarnation; for introducing pagan notions “about human souls, heaven, and earth, and other creatures” into Christian theology (the notion about human souls is later clarified as the doctrine of transmigration of souls); for adhering to the “foolish so-called wisdom of the external philosophers” (the “outer wisdom,” as it was sometimes called, i.e. the teachings of the pagan philosophers); for maintaining that matter and the Platonic ideas are eternal; for honoring the pagan philosophers above the Fathers of the Church; for rejecting, or explaining away, miracles; for denying creation out of nothing, the general resurrection, and final judgment. The general tone of the anathemas is summed up in this anathema:

On those who pursue Hellenic learning and are formed by it not simply as an educational discipline, but follow their empty opinions, and believe them to be true, and thus become involved in them, as possessing certainty, so that they introduce others to them, whether secretly or openly, and teach them as indubitable: [on them let there be] *Anathema!*

Hellenic, classical, learning is to be permitted simply as an educational exercise, not as a body of knowledge.¹⁹

Involved in the process against Italos was the brother of emperor Alexios I, Isaac the Sebastokrator, himself a scholar of considerable learning. It has been argued by Carlos Steel, followed by Fr. Maximos Simonopetrites,²⁰ that Isaac used Maximos’ doctrine of the *logoi* to produce a more open-textured understanding of the workings of providence, developing thereby a genuine Christian Neoplatonism, drawing on Maximos. Alas, the condemnation of Italos, presided over by Isaac, and the blanket rejection of the ideas and concepts of the Platonic tradition that it entailed, meant that little or nothing of the rediscovery of the texts of the Platonic tradition that Psellos and his disciples had facilitated was able to bear fruit in the following centuries. Nevertheless, Nicholas of Methone’s *Refutation* of Proklos’ *Elements of Theology* in the twelfth century suggests that interest in the theology of Proklos continued in Byzantium.

TURN TO THE WEST

After the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders in 1204, the Byzantine empire was fragmented and scholarly activity either curtailed or concealed. By the time the empire began to recover, with the return of the emperor

¹⁹ Goulliard 1967. ²⁰ Simonopetrites 2013: 41–42.

Michael VIII Palaiologos to Constantinople as his capital in 1261, the need for some reconciliation with the west became paramount. A first attempt at such reconciliation took place at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 but was a disaster: the submission of the emperor and his advisors to papal terms was decisively rejected by the people of the empire. Michael seems to have put this down to ignorance and his initial reaction was to seek to make Latin theology accessible in the Byzantine world by commissioning a translation of Augustine's *De trinitate* from Manuel (later known by his monastic name, Maximos) Planoudes, which was completed in 1280. Planoudes produced other translations from Latin, notably a translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* in about 1295. These were among the first translations of Latin works into Greek, save for the translations of Gregory the Great: his *Regula pastoralis* is said to have been translated in the early seventh century by Anastasios II, patriarch of Antioch, but no trace of it survives; his *Dialogues* were translated in the eighth century by pope Zacharias and achieved such popularity in the Byzantine world that Gregory came to be known as ὁ Διάλογος (*ho Dialogos*). Planoudes' translations are both of works by great Latin Platonists, but there is little or no evidence that they made any impact as such. Augustine seems to have been dipped into for his take on the issues dividing east and west, such as the *filioque*.

The fourteenth century was dominated, so far as theology was concerned, first by the Hesychast controversy and then by the translations into Greek of works by Thomas Aquinas, beginning with his *Summa contra Gentiles*, translated by Demetrios Kydones in 1354. This certainly marked a distinctive continuation in the making available in the Greek east of Latin theology.

HESYCHASM

The dispute between Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas began, not with the Hesychast controversy proper, but with Barlaam's attempt to solve the division between east and west over the *filioque* controversy. In treatises written in 1334–1335, he argued that any precise understanding of the mystery of the Trinity was beyond human understanding, and that therefore it would be logical for the Latin Church to remove the *filioque* clause from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed; in particular he rejected the use of Aristotelian logic in matters theological. For Palamas, this was altogether too timid a stance, and in three *Apodeictic Treatises on the Procession of the Spirit* he sought to demonstrate that the double procession of the Spirit is false: the title of these treatises suggests a certain confidence in his arguments from passages in Scripture and the Fathers, though whether this amounts to any serious Aristotelianism may

be doubted. (It is interesting to note that Barlaam's arguments were adopted, anonymously, by Nilos Kabasilas, and formed the basis of the Orthodox position on the *filioque* at the Council of Florence.)²¹ As the controversy developed, from 1337 onwards, Barlaam began to attack the monks of the Holy Mountain who claimed to see the uncreated light of the Godhead as a result of their practice of the prayer of the heart. The controversy developed and Palamas' developed position against Barlaam was set out in his *Triads in Defence of the Hesychasts*. Eventually, Palamas reconciled the unknowability of God with the monks' claim to see the uncreated light by making a distinction between the essence or οὐσία (*ousia*) of God which is unknowable and his activities, or ἐνέργειαι (*energiāi*), which are knowable; these activities of God are not distinct from God; they are not created effects. It is striking that Gregory begins to use this distinction in a settled way only in the third of the *Triads*; in the earlier *Triads*, he experiments with other distinctions, such as the distinction between God's essence and his glory. Palamas' position, with the essence/energies distinction, was affirmed in the *Tome of the Holy Mountain*, written by Palamas in mid-1340 and signed by twenty-one monastic leaders of Athos in 1341. There is no need to go into the details of the Hesychast controversy, as they are treated elsewhere in this volume.²²

To Palamas' mind, the controversy was essentially about whether we can make any progress in knowledge of God using human reason or whether, as he thought, it is only by grace that God can be approached: the distinction between the outer and inner wisdom was to be drawn with stark exclusion. From what Palamas says at the very beginning of the *Triads*, Barlaam had claimed that there are *logoi* of creation, grounded in the divine mind, which have corresponding images in the human soul. Palamas took this to mean that knowledge of these images, attained apart from grace, could lead to knowledge of God. Whatever Barlaam meant, it looks as if he was invoking Maximos' doctrine of the *logoi*. Palamas seems not to have recognized this and thus lost the possibility of thinking through a more considered view of the relationship between God and his Creation: the possibility had probably already been lost to the Byzantine world by the blanket condemnation of Platonism in the anathemas added to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* in 1082.²³

In discussion of the uncreated light of the Godhead, the light that shone forth on the Apostles on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration, there was much recourse to Maximos the Confessor's treatment of the Transfiguration in *Amb.* 10. Maximos' treatment of the nature of symbol in that *Ambiguum* is fundamentally Platonic, the symbol bodying forth the

²¹ Kislas 2001. ²² See Chapter 29. ²³ Simonopetrites 2013: 44–46.

reality it represents, rather than being quite distinct. Maximos' treatment is, however, more deeply theological, and makes deft use of the terminology of the Chalcedonian Christological Definition of Faith (451). In a further stage of the controversy, Palamas had to meet the arguments of Gregory Akindynos and Nikephoros Gregoras. Very little research has been devoted to the details of these arguments (which are, indeed, tedious to read), but perhaps a few points may be made. First of all, although Gregoras was a leading lay intellectual for whom theological interests were not a major concern, it is misleading to count Akindynos as another lay intellectual, as is commonly done. It seems that he had himself been an Athonite monk and became the spiritual father to Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina-Palaiologina, daughter-in-law of the emperor Andronikos II;²⁴ he should then be thought of as an opponent to Palamas from within the monastic order. His objections to Palamism seem to me largely to amount to a feeling that Palamas was unlike what he was familiar with from the great Fathers, such as Athanasios and the Cappadocians. In the early stages of the controversy, he took particular exception to Palamas' claim that the uncreated activities of God are transcended by God's essence ἀπειράκις ἀπειρώς (*apeirakis apeiros*, or "by an infinite amount, and an infinite number of times") (cf. *Ref.* 1.6), which Palamas had justified by reference to Maximos. There are two passages in Maximos where this expression occurs (*Centuries on Theology and Economy* [*Cent. theol. oec.*] 1.7; 49); neither of these refers to the difference between God's essence and activities, and the latter certainly refers to the gulf between God and created beings. It seems to be the case that none of Palamas' supporters followed him in this; all modified his distinction between essence and energies.²⁵

. . . AND THOMISM

The discovery of Aquinas through the translations of his works into Greek by Kydones and others led to a fascination with Aquinas in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth unparalleled in the west, where Aquinas' star had declined. It introduced into the Byzantine intellectual world an interest in Aristotelianism – not just logic but metaphysics – that excited many (though Aristotle was hardly unknown in the Greek world). It would be misleading to think in terms of a polarity between Platonism and Aristotelianism, and still more so to align Palamites with Plato and their opponents with Aristotle, or even to oppose Thomism and Hesychasm, for the Hesychast controversy had been resolved by the time of the advent of Thomism in Byzantium. Theophanes, a disciple of Philotheos Kokkinos and bishop of Nicaea (d.

²⁴ Nadal Cañellas 2006: v. 2, 83–89. ²⁵ Demetracopoulos 2011.

c. 1380), a defender of Palamism, was deeply influenced by Aristotelianism, not least by his hylomorphism (his understanding that beings are a combination of form and matter), and may well have been a Thomist. However, in his three treatises on the Light of Tabor, he defends Palamas' understanding of the uncreated light, drawing deeply on Maximos.²⁶ In what turned out to be the last century of Byzantium, issues polarized and dramatic solutions beckoned, but this is covered in other chapters in this volume.

²⁶ Sotiropoulos 1996: 95–317.

CHAPTER 20

FATE, FREE CHOICE, AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE FROM THE NEOPLATONISTS TO JOHN OF DAMASCUS

KEN PARRY

INTRODUCTION

The history of the concepts of fate (εἰμαρμένη / *heimarmene*), free choice (προαίρεσις / *prohairesis*), and divine providence (θεία πρόνοια / *theia pronoia*) between the fifth and the eighth centuries exemplifies the transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages in intellectual terms.¹ It was in this period that philosophy and theology developed durable models for the agency of divine providence and its concomitants, the problem of evil, free choice, predestination, justice, necessity, and divine foreknowledge. Both Platonists and Christians devised theodicies to safeguard the sovereignty of providence in response to the presence of evil and injustice, and were at pains to demonstrate the fundamental goodness that infused the universe. This ultimate optimism was tempered at times by difficult life circumstances and pervasive uncertainty.

Such existential questions were not new but they appear prominently in the period under discussion. Plotinus in the third century summed up the concern when he observed in his discussion of free choice that we may fear we are nothing when crushed by adverse events (*Enneads* 6.8.1). In the Latin west, works were composed in response to the barbarian invasions that defied divine providence against accusations of desertion and abandonment. One has only to think of Augustine's *The City of God* (his treatise *On Providence and the Problem of Evil* was an earlier work) and Salvian's *On the Governance of God* to see that the Christian worldview was in need of intellectual support. Thus began an apologetic tradition that took the blame for the loss of empire away from God and placed it on the shoulders of disobedient and sinful Christians. It was a theme that was to reemerge in the wake of the Arab invasions of the seventh century, in such works as the *Apocalypse* of pseudo-Methodios.

Before we delve into the texts that bridge the early and middle Byzantine periods, a survey of their antecedents is necessary. The

¹ Louth 2007b; Adamson 2014.

question of divine providence was not fully explored by Plato himself, who contented himself with passing observations in the *Laws* (10: 902d–904c), *Timaeus* (30b–48a), and the myth of Er in the *Republic* (10: 613–620). Aristotle’s limited remarks were taken to imply that providence was not concerned with individuals and applied only to the celestial sphere (*Metaphysics* 12.7:1072b). His commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias, who wrote *On Fate* and *On Providence* (which survives in an Arabic translation and some Greek fragments), extended providence to include the sublunary realm, but limited it to species (*On Fate* 160). This position eventually proved unacceptable to Platonists and Christians alike. This is why Gregory of Nazianzos made his remark about Aristotle’s “mean” understanding of providence (*Oration* 27.10).² Philo of Alexandria composed a work *On Providence*, preserved in an Armenian translation, while among the Platonists Plutarch is said to have written *On What Lies in Our Power: Against the Stoics*, as well as *On Fate*, and Alcinous in his *Handbook of Platonism* makes a contribution to the debate. Plotinos in his *Enneads* has two treatises on providence (*Enn.* 3. 2–3), one on free choice (*Enn.* 6.8), and another on evil (*Enn.* 1.8), while his disciple Porphyry composed a work *On What Is in Our Power*, which deals with the choice of reincarnated life. Questions relating to providence and free choice were also discussed in other ancient languages, in Latin by Cicero and Seneca, while in the second century the Syrian Christian Bardaisan wrote his *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, which deals with fate and free choice. Providence was discussed by early Christian writers in reaction to Gnostic dualism and astral fatalism, notably by Origen in his *On First Principles*. Among Christian authors of the fourth century, the Cappadocians discuss our topic, specifically Basil the Great in his homilies on the *Hexaemeron* (*The Six Days of Creation*), Gregory of Nazianzos in his *Orations* and poems, and Gregory of Nyssa in his *On the Making of Man*. Nemesios of Emesa has an extended discussion on several theories of providence in his *On the Nature of Man*.

THE FIFTH CENTURY: HIEROKLES OF ALEXANDRIA,
THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, AND PROKLOS

The Platonist Hierokles of Alexandria composed a treatise *On Providence*, extracts from which are preserved by Photios (*Bibliothèque* codd. 214 and 251). He wrote it to console his friend the historian Olympiodoros on the loss of his adopted son. In it he develops the idea that fate accompanies providence but is subordinate to it, and he applies the notion of

² Bydén 2013.

“conditional fate” (a probable source being Alcinous) to reconcile fate and free choice. He speaks of two types of providence: the primary incorporeal and the secondary material, the first pertaining to the gods and the second to human beings and other rational beings. The latter incorporates chance (τύχη / *tyche*) and opportune moment (καιρός / *kairos*), and is associated with fate which is conditioned by what is merited from previous lives (*Bibliotheke* 251.20). He points to the limits of free choice by remarking that our will is not capable of changing everything simply by exercising freedom of choice. If this were so, it would result in a multiplicity of worlds because we do not all want the same things (251.26). Only certain things lie within our power, and as rational beings we are worthy of a different fate from irrational animals. For the latter, their demise is undetermined because there is no judgment regarding their present lives, whereas for us additional factors determine the time and manner of our end. The consequences of our choices, as well as what “apparently” happens by chance (τύχη / *tyche*), contribute to our fate and the judgment that awaits us, but ultimately all is corrected according to the laws of fate that the creator has ordained for us (251.31). For Hierokles divine judgment and free choice exist in an intricate net (πλέγμα / *plegma*) of interdependence that we need to discern in order to practice the virtue that brings its own reward in terms of shortening the cycle of rebirth (251.15–16).

On the Christian side, we have the work *On Providence* by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, which endorses the idea that God ordained the Incarnation from all eternity (10.44–57). Christ’s Incarnation was fore-known from the beginning and was not dependent upon the Fall; it was not atonement for sins, but the supreme example of providential care. Theodoret criticizes those who say that God does not concern himself with what exists, as well as those who say that he extends his providence only as far as the moon (1.10). His initial chapters focus on the argument from design to demonstrate the harmonious ordering of the universe and the human body as evidence for a providential creator (1–3). A central theme of the work is the justification of the political status quo by insisting that the rank of each person in society is providentially determined.³ Unlike Gregory of Nyssa, who wanted to abolish slavery (*Homily on Ecclesiastes* 4), Theodoret views the master–slave relationship as necessary for good governance and social stability (7–8) (the Byzantine Church did not outlaw slave ownership by bishops and other clergy). He defends the dependency of the poor on the rich, and the symbiotic nature of their relationship, against those who see inequalities and injustices as evidence for a world

³ Siniossoglou 2008: 217–233.

bereft of divine concern (6), citing the example of Job, who remained steadfast in the face of unwarranted and inexplicable suffering.

The most important Platonist contribution to our topic in the fifth century was that of Proklos in the three works discussed below, but he also touches on it in other works, such as the *Elements of Theology* (Prop. 120–122). The three works are the so-called *tria opuscula*, and they tackle several of the issues that dominate Platonist discussions of providence and evil. Space allows us only to summarize their arguments. In *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, Proklos begins by noting that the problems associated with providence have been subject to a great deal of scrutiny, but that it is important to look at them again in order to refute those who do not believe in it. The problems concern how providence knows contingent things, how things participate in providence, the existence of evil (treated more extensively in *On the Existence of Evils*; see below), human inequalities, the animal kingdom, rewards and punishments, and inherited guilt. The notion of “inherited guilt” or “ancestral fault” (προγονικὸν ἁμάρτημα / *progonikon hamartema*) concerns the wrong-doings of ancestors passed on to their descendants as a result of metempsychosis.⁴ Gregory of Nyssa had discussed two theories of transmigration: that human souls migrate into plants and animals and that human souls migrate only into human bodies (*On the Soul and the Resurrection* 8). The latter position was that embraced by Proklos (*Ten Problems* 60).

Let us take the question of providence in relation to animals. Proklos proposes that in general animals are ruled by fate, but to some extent also by providence because they have a vestige of rationality and therefore a degree of self-determination. If this is the case, then it suggests that the principle of merit (reward and punishment) applies to them and that they should be treated with justice (*Ten Problems* 7). Proklos is here entering into the debate within the Platonist tradition regarding justice toward animals that Plutarch and Porphyry (*On Abstinence*) had discussed. According to his biographer Marinos, Proklos is said to have abstained from animal food and merely tasted it for the sake of piety (*Life of Proklos* 9), and we know from Porphyry that Plotinos avoided animal products (*Life of Plotinos* 2). For Basil the Great, the prelapsarian diet was vegetarian (*First Homily on Fasting* 5) and this was to become the norm in Byzantine monasteries. However, Christian vegetarianism was based not on a theory of justice toward animals but on ascetic denial and discipline.⁵

Proklos' treatise *On Providence* responds in the form of a letter to Theodore the engineer's arguments in favour of determinism. At one point Proklos argues *ad hominen* that because Theodore equates the

⁴ Gagné 2013: 22–79. ⁵ Parry 2005.

universe with a mechanical clock he sees the maker of the universe (δημιουργός / *demiourgos*) as a kind of engineer like himself. He provides the classical Platonist response to the question “what depends on us?” (ἐφ’ ἡμῶν / *eph’ hēmin*), by stating that what depends on us is what belongs to our faculty of choice, not to divine action.⁶ He distinguishes what pertains to choice and what to will, with the will only regarding the good, whereas choice is concerned with good and evil (*Prov.* 2.7.57). He further maintains that our lives are a mixture of what does and what does not depend on us, and that those who follow virtue have more that depends on them, while those who follow worldly pursuits have less. The first are free but the second are slaves to necessity (*Prov.* 2.7.61). For Proklos, true freedom is a divine gift that comes from knowing what lies in our power and what does not. It is in this context that he discusses the efficacy of prayer and theurgy, as well as divination, the art of predicting the future through auguries, astrological predictions, and horoscopes, which he says is well attested in many Greek and non-Greek sources (*Prov.* 2.37–39). In the sixth century, the historian Agathias refers to astrological predictions of inauspicious cycles that provide a deterministic explanation for contemporary wars, political conflicts, and plagues (*Histories* 5.10.5).

In the third treatise *On the Existence of Evils*, Proklos poses a dilemma: if providence is the cause of everything then evil cannot exist, but if it does exist then providence is not the cause of everything. He resolves this dilemma by stating that although evil is part of the providential order it is not caused by it. The gods and providence are absolved from responsibility for the evils that happen in our world (*Evils* 58). Proklos rejects the Plotinian proposition that identifies evil with matter (*Enn.* 1.8.14) by raising the question that, if matter is formless and without quality, how then can it be the cause of anything, let alone evil? Evil is relative, not absolute; it cannot exist independently of the good, and is therefore mixed with the good. Lacking an efficient cause, it is in fact a by-product, or παραπρόστασις (*parhypostasis*) in Proklos’ language. The term was adopted by Dionysios the Areopagite who was followed in this by Maximos the Confessor and John of Damascus (see below). Proklos is here applying the Aristotelian causal distinction between what happens *per se* and what happens *per accidens* (*Metaph.* 5.2:1013b–1014a), with the latter being contingent upon the former.

Evil may be a privation and coexistent of good but it still happens within the control of the gods, otherwise Proklos would have to posit two independent principles, one good and one bad, resulting in a dualism that would undermine his monadic credentials (i.e. his belief in a single source). He has to be careful not to turn evil into an autonomous principle

⁶ Steel 2014.

on the one hand, or implicate the gods in it on the other. Unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, Proklos does not have a personified fallen angel like Satan on which to pin it, and there are no intermediary daemons to carry this burden. The daemons maintain the perfection of their rank and are “malicious” only insofar as the gods allow them to be for our betterment (*Evils* 18). Besides, for Proklos there is no one cause of evil but many, because as a *parhypostasis* evil is dependent on many factors (*Evils* 47.2–4), even though ultimately it is mixed with the good. He clearly states that everything is for the sake of the good, even evil itself, but although all things are for the sake of the good, divinity is not the cause of evil. When he says that the gods produce evil *qua* good (*Evils* 61.5–18), this suggests that suffering and injustice will have more meaning for us if we see it from the perspective of eternity, rather than *sub specie humanitatis*.

The gods may have foreknowledge of contingent events, but those who benefit from the providence they confer do so according to their capacity to receive it. This is because the nature of divinity by definition cannot take a relational (personal) interest in earthly persons and events (*Elements of Theology*, Prop. 122), yet at the same time neither is plurality nor individuality negated by providential care. How then does prayer function for the Platonist?⁷ Origen was one of the earliest Christian writers to explore the relation of providence to prayer in his treatise *On Prayer*, as well as in connection with the “idle argument” (ἄργος λόγος / *argos logos*) for fatalism (*Against Kelsos* 2.20). For Hierokles, prayer is a gift of providence itself, thus it is necessary to practice it in order to live in conformity with the divine. Furthermore, what lies in our power implies providence while equally providence implies what lies in our power (*Bibliotheke* 251.25). This reciprocity is endorsed by Proklos (*Prov.* 37) when he says that the gods know what depends on us in a divine and timeless manner, but this does not prevent us from acting in accordance with our nature. Whatever we decide is foreknown by them, because it is determined not by us but by them (*Prov.* 65.11–14). In associating providence with the gods Proklos etymologizes that *pronoia* derives from *pro noia*, meaning before intelligence or intellection (*Prov.* 1.1.7). As he says in the *Elements of Theology*, providence by its very name suggests an activity prior to intellect (Prop. 120).

THE SIXTH CENTURY: OLYMPIODOROS OF ALEXANDRIA,
JOHN PHILOPONOS, AND DIONYSIOS THE AREOPAGITE

The political situation for Platonist philosophers deteriorated in the sixth century as a result of Justinian’s policy toward the Athenian school.

⁷ Dillon 2014.

The persecution of pagan intellectuals in Alexandria in the 480s under Zeno had led to the temporary closure of some schools. A school was reopened under Ammonios and that of Olympiodoros was still functioning in the middle of the sixth century, but the allegiance of their pupils and relations with the Alexandrian Church are not entirely clear. The same goes for those who followed them, Elias, David, and Stephanos, whose names, if not the writings attributed to them, suggest recognition of the prevailing tendency. It is questionable whether this Stephanos of Alexandria/Athens took up a teaching position at Constantinople under Herakleios.⁸

In his *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*, Olympiodoros discusses what lies "in our power" and what does not, observing that the former pertains to virtues and the latter to the gaining of wealth and power (39.1). Presumably the Platonic notion of self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια / *enkrateia*) would not allow a philosopher to pursue the latter anyway, except for its utility in promoting the good. What appears to us a matter of chance is in fact known to providence (17.2), and the power of providence is such that there is no injustice in the universe (19.2–3). He says this to explain unjust and postponed punishment in this life carried over from wrongs committed in a previous life. The question of ancestral guilt was one that continued to occupy Platonists after the attention given to it by Hierokles and Proklos. At one point Olympiodoros equates justice with holiness because this is pleasing to God, and further remarks that prayer is linked to holiness (35.2). The role of prayer in later Platonism was associated with assimilation to God (cf. *Theaetetus* 176a–b), which is probably why Olympiodoros makes this connection, but he does not say to what extent it is a participation in the divine. This does not necessarily mean a concession to Christian piety, however, given the efficacy of prayer and theurgy advocated by earlier Platonists, notably Iamblichos and Proklos. In the sixth-century *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, often attributed to Olympiodoros or to one of his pupils, the presentation of Plato's understanding of providence is contrasted with that of the Epicureans and the Stoics.⁹

Another Alexandrian, the anti-Chalcedonian Christian John Philoponos, quotes passages from Proklos' *Ten Problems Concerning Providence* in his work *Against Proklos on the Eternity of the World* (2.4–5), published in 529, the year Justinian closed the Academy. In doing so he says that Proklos is in agreement with the Christians on the protection of divine providence and not even the smallest things escape God's attention (2.5). Yet there is no necessity for things to exist, for whatever is thought by God does not exist simultaneously with the thought (4.9). The king may be the subject of a portrait, but this does not mean that

⁸ Wolska-Conus 1989. ⁹ Westerink 1962: II.8.

because the king exists a portrait of him must also exist (2.4). The discussion here concerning relatives (πρός τι / *pros ti*) is based on Aristotle's *Categories* (7:7b15–25), and reappears in the arguments of ninth-century Byzantine iconophiles on the relation of images to their prototypes.¹⁰ We may note in passing that Philoponos composed a (lost) refutation of Iamblichos' treatise on the divine inhabitation of statues that was known to Photios (*Bibliotheke* cod. 215). The point being made is that although the Platonic forms are eternal it is not necessary that their copies should always exist. There must be a form for a copy to exist, but this does not mean that copies of every form must exist as well (2.4). The forms in the mind of God are eternal, but this is not the case for the things he creates from them. In other words, the creation of a finite universe does not diminish or compromise God's infinite power and goodness. This is said to refute the Platonist view that because the world is made from preexisting matter it must ipso facto be eternal.

Philoponos points out that even Proklos concedes that there is disagreement between Plato and Aristotle on the theory of forms (2.2). It was, however, the standard Neoplatonic view that there was no disagreement between the Academy and the Lyceum and that it was the philosopher's task to harmonize them. Hierokles in the fifth century was at the forefront of this harmonizing enterprise, a topic that was discussed by Porphyry in a lost work, *On the One School of Plato and Aristotle*. Aristotle's criticism of the theory of forms was not interpreted as a complete rejection of this basic tenet of the Platonic system. When it comes to divine providence God foreknows future things and events and what will happen as a consequence of the choices we make in accordance with providence. Even future time is already present to the creator of time through foreknowledge, but there is no necessity that a thing should occur simply because God foreknows it (4.9). We would have no choice in the matter if God's foreknowledge of what will occur were the cause of it happening.

Philoponos takes issue with the Platonic commentators for misrepresenting the teaching of Plato himself. They want to have it both ways: on the one hand, they maintain that Plato taught that the world was without generation, while on the other that it was generated with respect to time, the latter being said hypothetically for the sake of clarity and a concession to piety. Furthermore, they say that Plato conceded that the world was generated with respect to time so that people would not lose faith in providence. But for Philoponos it is absurd to posit such a hypothesis when Plato clearly stated that God was responsible for the creation of the world, as well as giving reasons why things are the way that they are. Indeed Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* (246a) that rational souls are ungenerated

¹⁰ Parry 2013.

without in the least implying that, by saying this, they are deprived of divine providence (6.21). The extent to which Philoponos' Christian faith influenced his creationist interpretation of Platonic cosmogony is being debated.¹¹ Whatever his stance, in refuting the doctrine of the eternity of the world he denied the difference between terrestrial and celestial matter (the quintessential element) (7.18). He was in turn refuted by Simplicios, one of the seven philosophers who left for the Sasanian court when Justinian closed the Academy, in his *Against Philoponos On the Eternity of the World*, but after that the series of refutations and counter-refutations comes to an end.

It was the unknown and pseudonymous author Dionysios the Areopagite who gave Proklos' views on providence and evil longevity by utilizing them in his writings. However, he was not the only Byzantine author to "Christianize" Proklos (Isaac Sebastokrator would do the same in the eleventh century).¹² We may note that the idea of evil being a *parhypostasis* or privation of the good is found among Christian authors before Dionysios, notably in Basil the Great's *God Is Not the Author of Evil* (*Homily* 9.5). The first to cite pseudo-Dionysios was the anti-Chalcedonian Severos of Antioch, and doubts concerning his authenticity were raised by Hypatios of Ephesos in 532, but these appear to have been countered by a certain Theodore in an apology known only from Photios (*Bibliotheke* cod. 1). The earliest commentator on pseudo-Dionysios, John of Scythopolis, discusses the question of evil as presented in the corpus, and says that Dionysios has demonstrated that evil is without an existence of its own by showing that it is a privation.¹³

In *Divine Names*, Dionysios asserts that evil is neither being nor non-being, nor is it found in God or the angels either, and that demons are not evil by nature (*DN* 4.19). With Proklos, he denies that evil is inherent in matter *qua* matter, because matter participates in the cosmos, beauty, and form. If matter did not participate in these things, it would lack form and quality, and therefore have no capacity to affect or produce anything. Evil *qua* evil cannot produce or sustain anything (4.28). God knows evil under the form of good and it is evident that evil exists as an accident (*συμβεβηκός* / *symbebekos*) because it depends on something else. Dionysios provides a list of apophatic attributes for evil, such as purposeless, lifeless, imperfect, uncaused, indeterminate, and powerless (4.32), some of which are listed by Proklos himself (*Evils* 50–51). Evil is not inherent in beings *per se* and only shares in being insofar as it is an admixture with the good. Divine providence is such that all things share in it and nothing that exists is without it. It makes good use of evil effects and provides for each particular being. He dismisses the idea that

¹¹ Bydén 2012a. ¹² Parry 2006. ¹³ Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 216–217.

providence may lead us to virtue even against our will. It does not destroy our nature but saves it (4.33).

Dionysios discusses the names by which providence is known, such as goodness, being, divinity, life, and wisdom, but these are not different causes or gods ranked in order of superiority, for there is only one God to whom all these are attributable. God is the possessor of these divine names, with goodness being the first name of providence, while the others reveal the specific ways he acts providentially (5.2). At one point he refers to an unknown work of his *On Justice and Divine Judgement*, in which, he says, he deals with the question of those who do not trust the good and who are inclined to evil, which is a deficiency of desire and knowledge of the good. There can be no excuse for this weakness, however, because the good has bestowed upon each of us the capacity to do what is right (4.35). In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he says that in spite of our expulsion from paradise divine goodness continues to pour its providential gifts upon us. This is shown by the fact that the Incarnation of Christ makes it possible for us to escape our fallen condition and attain a deified state (3.11).

Dionysios adopts the image of the mixing bowl from Proverbs 9:1–5 to illustrate the overflowing bounties of providence (*Letter* 9.3). Like the infinite circle with no beginning nor end, the bowl symbolizes the nature of providence bestowing its largesse on creation. The metaphor of the circle and points radiating from it is used by Dionysios (*DN* 2.5) as well as by Proklos (*Ten Problems* 1.5) and Maximos the Confessor (*Ambigua* 7), to emphasize the unitary nature of the relationship of the one to the many.¹⁴ For Dionysios providence proceeds outwards to everything while in no way diminishing or reducing itself. It remains static and unchanged within itself, always at rest but moving, yet never at rest or moving, operating in the triadic mode of rest, procession, and return. In his scholion on this passage, John of Scythopolis remarks that divine providence existed before all creation, even before beings were conceived in the ideas of God. Whatever would come to be was prefigured in these divine paradigms and conceptions.¹⁵

THE SEVENTH CENTURY: THEOPHYLAKTOS SIMOKATTES,
ANASTASIOS OF SINAI, AND MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

Our theme continues in a work entitled *On [Predestined] Terms of Life*, attributed to the seventh-century historian Theophylaktos Simokattes. If Theophylaktos is the author, then it is the earliest work with this title, but by no means the first to discuss its subject-matter. The title derives from the homily by Basil the Great *God Is not the Author of Evil*, which uses

¹⁴ Cvetković 2011. ¹⁵ Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 262.

the expression “terms of life” (περὶ ὅρων ζωῆς / *peri horon zoes*). The passage reads:

Death comes to those whose term of life is completed; from the beginning, the just judgment of God has appointed this for each person, as he foresees from long before what is advantageous to each of us. (*Hom.* 9.3)

Theophylaktos’ work argues for and against the notion of divine predestination and is similar in tenor to a work attributed to patriarch Germanos I in the eighth century (see below). To some extent Theophylaktos’ interest in this question is reflected in his better-known *History*, in which his Christian worldview is evident in his presentation and interpretation of historical events.¹⁶

Theophylaktos’ text is in the form of set speeches by Theognostos who argues for the thesis and Theophrastos who argues against, while both are adjudicated by Euangelos and Theopemptos who suggest a middle course. The discussion centers on the relation of free choice to divine providence and whether the time of our death is contingent upon our actions. If God is omniscient then he knows when we will die, and if he knows that, then our death may be said to be predetermined. However, this does not mean that we should adopt a fatalist position according to which we need not concern ourselves with acting for the good because God has foreknowledge of when we shall die. Theophylaktos is keen to point out that although God knows the terms of our lives, neither our virtues nor our vices are attributable to his foreknowledge (31). The exercise of free choice is not foreordained, otherwise it would not be free choice but predetermination (25). Generally, the text does not go into depth and relies heavily on scriptural quotations, in contrast to the more developed discussion in Germanos’ work of the same name. However, the judgment of the translators of the text that it is a rhetorical showpiece fails to do it justice.¹⁷

The same theme is explored in the *Questions and Answers* of another seventh-century author, Anastasios of Sinai.¹⁸ In a second work ascribed to Anastasios, the *Hexaemeron*, divine providence is shown to be instrumental in the biblical creation story, with the Incarnation built into the divine plan from the beginning (*Hex.* 1.8.1–2). The special status afforded human beings made in the “image and likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26) provides further evidence of providential concern. Anastasios follows the teaching of earlier Greek Fathers who hold that as a result of the Fall the *imago Dei* is retained but the likeness is lost, and that it is through the practice of virtue that the likeness is regained. As he says, that which is in the likeness is related to our free choice and is acquired through virtuous actions. More

¹⁶ Theophylaktos Simocattes, *History* xv–xvi.

¹⁷ Theophylaktos Simocattes, *On Predestined Terms of Life* xi. ¹⁸ Munitiz 2011.

pointedly, he refers to a “stupid pagan philosopher” (meaning Plato) who stole from Scripture the idea that philosophy is assimilation (ὁμοίωσις / *homoiosis*) to God (*Hex.* 6.4.5).

In his *Questions and Answers*, Anastasios explains the notion “terms of life” by saying that the limit of each lifespan is not a foreordained number of years. If this were so, then a predetermination (προορισμός / *proorismos*) of fixed years would result in God being responsible for wars, the sick would not seek medical help, and no one would ask for the intercession of saints (Q 16). In short, everything would be inevitable, unavoidable, and inescapable. Even though God foreknows everything, he did not intervene to shorten Judas’ life and save him from damnation for his betrayal. Referring to the passage from Basil the Great, he says that the limits set for each person’s life come only when the limits have been reached. Seen from this perspective, neither good people who live brief lives nor wicked people who live long lives die inappropriately; in short there is no improper time for when they should die. He distinguishes between foreknowledge and predetermination by saying that God has foreknowledge of evil events but he does not foreordain them. He did not foreordain the Fall and its consequences but he certainly foreknew it.

Anastasios proposes that if we knew beforehand when we will die we would not necessarily seek conversion. If someone knew he was going to live for a hundred years he would not bother with virtue and justice, but would leave his conversion till his final days. But what reward would such a person receive, who served God for only a few days out of necessity (Q 17)? It is because we do not know when we will die that we are responsible for the choices we make. Anastasios remarks that it is not only Christians who may be bewildered because they do not think the world is governed by providence (Q 28). In another question discussing “chance” (τύχη / *tyche*), he says that this means governance of the world without providence, and for a Christian to talk of chance is to deny that God knows and foresees everything (Q 85). When we see inequalities and injustices we should not blame them on God. We need to understand that divine foreknowledge has arranged (οἰκονόμησεν / *oikonomesen*) that all things act under the influence of God. He notes the effects of climate on fauna and flora and the fact that some zones are more temperate than others. He even adds a personal anecdote concerning a visit he made to the Dead Sea where he observed how convict labour from Cyprus coped with the extreme heat. He concludes from this that God has granted to each being the power to act according to its own particular operation (ἐνέργεια / *energeia*). He connects this to the theory of the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) that God has ordained in order to create and sustain all animate and inanimate things (Q 28).

The most important Byzantine theologian of the seventh century was Maximos the Confessor. Maximos came to prominence as a result of the Monoenergist and Monothelite controversies and suffered physical torture and exile as a consequence. Our main focus here will be on his discussion of divine providence in the *Ambigua*, a corpus of texts which deal with difficulties in the writings of the Fathers, especially Gregory of Nazianzos and Dionysios the Areopagite. Maximos uses the tools of late antique philosophy to elucidate their ideas and in doing so examines the nature of human volition, free choice, and divine providence.

In *Ambigua* 10, Maximos explains the role of divine providence in holding creation and individuation together, the parts to the whole, in the best possible arrangement. In doing so, he draws on the thought of Nemesios (*On the Nature of Man* 42–43), quoting verbatim several passages, and noting with him the contrary position of philosophers who limit the exercise of providence to universals while denying it to particulars (*Amb.* 10.42). Maximos points out that by denying particulars one also denies universals, because it is impossible to have one without the other. Those who confine providence to universals are guilty of a logical fallacy that affirms what they wish to deny, that is, the indissoluble relation that unites them. The metaphysical value of individuals was essential to the Christian understanding of providence and personal salvation. He further remarks, taking his cue from Nemesios (43), that there are three theories that deny God's providence over all things, viz., that God is ignorant of the ways of providence, or that he does not wish to use them, or that he lacks the power to do so (*Amb.* 10.42).

Maximos endorses Nemesios' suggestion that nature itself implants knowledge of providence in us (*Nature* 43). This is evident from the fact that we evoke God's name in a crisis and pray for deliverance from the vicissitudes of existence. Proklos had cited the Platonic *locus classicus* for evoking a god in times of stress (*Timaeus* 27c1–3) and, as we have seen, comments on the efficacy of prayer (*Prov.* 38). Because there is infinite variety among human beings in relation to their choices, opinions, desires, skills, thoughts, and so forth, as well as the changes they undergo in the course of an hour or a day, then providence with foreknowledge (προγνωστικῶς / *prognostikos*) must comprehend all particulars in their individuality. If providence extends itself to the myriad incomprehensible details that make up our lives, it follows that the means by which it does so must be infinite. However, the fact that these means are boundless and beyond our knowledge is no reason to deny that providence is concerned for all things. But Maximos warns us not to take "all things" to include the evil things that depend on us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν / *eph' hemin*), for these are foreign to the order of providence (*Amb.* 10.42). Elsewhere, he speaks of sin coming into existence as the result of Adam's free choice (προαίρεσις /

prohairesis) (*Ad Thalassium* 42.8), and follows Dionysios in using the term *parhypostasis* to explain the dependent nature of evil (51.186).

Maximos correlates providence with judgment (κρίσις / *krisis*), not as they relate to punishment, but as they relate to individual identity because God has judged how each thing will be. The pairing of providence and judgment is known from Evagrius of Pontos (*Gnostikos* 48), but Maximos makes use of these terms for his own ends. Both providence and judgment are linked to our voluntary impulses and act to prevent us from doing evil while at the same time they convert us back to what is good. The two direct the course of things that are not under our control (ὄυκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν / *ouk eph' hēmin*),¹⁹ in a way opposite to what is within our control, while uprooting not merely the present evil, but past and future evils as well. There are not two kinds of providence and judgment, for they are potentially the same, although in relation to us they assume different activities (*Amb.* 10.19). Ultimately providence guides us to well-being (εὖ εἶναι / *eu einai*) when we adopt the virtuous life in order to strive for the divine likeness, that is, deification (*Ad Thalassium* 64).²⁰

Maximos identifies the divine predeterminations of Dionysios with the *logoi* or creative principles of God that have been fixed before the ages (*Amb.* 7). He says that all things that have been or will come to be have been willed in advance by God, and are foreknown by him, and to each particular being he gives substance and subsistence at the fitting and appropriate time. It would be a mistake to think that God knows particular things only when they come into being. On the contrary, each thing comes into being at the predetermined time and is known according to God's foreknowledge and infinite power (*Amb.* 42.14). Furthermore, we were predestined before the ages to be in Christ as members of his body (*Amb.* 7). The mystery of the Incarnation lies not just in Christ taking a body consubstantial with us, but also in the fact that he remains forever embodied. He assumed flesh to become the prototype and pattern of virtue for us to follow, but he did not abandon his body after his Resurrection and Ascension (*Amb.* 42). In the eighth and ninth centuries, this teaching became important for iconophiles arguing for the representation of Christ in such depictions as the Anastasis.²¹

In order to correct the errors of the Origenists, Maximos discusses the subject of a final restoration or ἀποκατάστασις (*apokatastasis*). In a Christian context, the question of whether there will be a final or universal restoration arises from the debate about providence, divine foreknowledge, and free choice. If there is to be salvation for all, then it can be argued that there is no need to do anything because we will be saved anyway, so a form of the fatalist "idle argument" comes into play. Maximos reviews the topic

¹⁹ Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook* 1.1. ²⁰ Cvetković 2011. ²¹ Parry 1996: 102–104, 112–113.

in response to a question regarding Gregory of Nyssa's position on the matter (*Catechetical Oration* 27), and mentions three ways to understand restoration, including Gregory's own; namely, the restoration of the powers of the soul to God so that it knows that God is not responsible for sin (*Quaestiones et dubia* 19). Perhaps we should note that for Proklos and the Platonists the term ἀποκατάστασις did not have the soteriological dimension that it had for Christians (*Elements of Theology*, Prop. 199).

THE EIGHTH CENTURY: PATRIARCH GERMANOS AND
JOHN OF DAMASCUS

The eunuch patriarch Germanos I was an important witness to the opening phase of Iconoclasm initiated by the emperor Leo III around 726. He was obliged to resign as patriarch in 730 and was replaced by an Iconoclast sympathizer. Amongst his literary output is a work entitled *On [Predestined] Terms of Life*, which, like the earlier work attributed to Theophylaktos, deals with divine providence, human freedom, and predestination. The style of the work is that of the "question-and-response" genre, which, as we saw with Anastasios, could contain questions relating to free choice and divine providence. In a lost work attributed to Germanos, the *Treatise on Requitual* (Ἀνταποδοτικὸς / *Antapodotikos*), which is reviewed by Photios (*Bibliothèque* cod. 233), the patriarch discusses the doctrine of ἀποκατάστασις (*apokatastasis*) and the salvation of demons which the followers of Origen claimed was supported by Gregory of Nyssa (*Catechetical Oration* 27). Germanos in turn suggests that Gregory's writings have been subject to interpolation and are not in fact susceptible to the Origenist interpretation. Not all will be saved but each will receive his or her just requital at the appointed time.²² This is in line with his work *On [Predestined] Terms of Life*, which demonstrates that there are terms of life which God foreknows but which we cannot determine.

The work is cast in the form of a dialogue, with the Alpha persona arguing for Basil's teaching and the Beta persona arguing against it. The topic of the dialogue gets underway as a result of the recent death of a friend of Beta, untimely death being a not uncommon motive for reflection upon the role of providence (9). For Alpha everything to do with sickness and health depends not on us, but rather on the lifespan distributed to us by God, to which Beta responds by saying that Basil's statement (see above) has given rise to much speculation (15). After further discussion as to the meaning of Basil's teaching, the debate moves to the topic of whether animals are subject to predestined terms of life. Beta thinks this must be the case given the scriptural passage

²² Lackner 1968.

(Ecclesiastes 3:9) according to which human beings have no superiority over beasts because both end up in the same place as dust, but Alpha argues against this interpretation by maintaining that the spirit of animals and human beings is different (21). This is based mainly on exegesis of further passages from the same book of Scripture. Theodoret of Cyrrihus notes that although human beings are superior to animals there is much that we can learn from the behaviour of non-rational creatures (*Prov.* 5.9). As we have seen, the debate on the status of animals and their relation to human beings was on-going in both the Platonic and Christian traditions.

The discussion then turns to the main theme. Alpha observes that God knows past, present, and future events simultaneously, and as a consequence predetermines his judgement upon them, unlike human beings who make judgments after events have occurred. We have the freedom to choose good or evil, and we learn through divine pedagogy to understand that God provides everything we need for our salvation (27). The nature of divine providence is such that it extends not only to non-rational creatures, such as the lowly sparrow, but also to numbering every hair on our head (Matthew 10.29–30). The concern of an all-embracing providence for such minutiae in no way diminishes God's glory or limits his foreknowledge (27). Indeed the power of the creator of everything (παντοουργός / *pantourgos*) to preserve and sustain what exists should evoke our admiration (33).

For Beta divine foreknowledge of the future would appear to necessitate what happens. However, Alpha argues against this interpretation by quoting from Athanasios' *Defense of his Flight* (14–15), which discusses the scriptural passages where Jesus says that his appointed hour had not yet come. Clearly as God he knew when the appointed hour would be because he did not surrender himself at once to his persecutors, but hid himself while they looked for him. For us, on the other hand, our allotted span is entirely unknown. Beta responds by raising the question of mass destruction: there may be terms of life for individuals, but what of death on a massive scale as the result of war or natural disaster (41)? Alpha replies that such things still occur under the guidance of providence and are intended to chasten those who survive. If massacres and disasters are attributable to chance (τύχη / *tyche*) and not to divine judgement, they would be seen as an aberration on the part of providence (59). Beta then raises the question of instrumentality in assisting God's work and purpose, suggesting that Judas should be praised for his betrayal because this allowed Christ to fulfil the task that his Father had set him. But Alpha will not exonerate Judas and others like him for bringing about Christ's death even though they were instrumental in carrying out God's plan (65). They were agents for good for all that their actions were wrong. Theodoret of Cyrrihus sees the

opposition of the Jews to Christ as instrumental in promoting the Christian faith, even though they were ignorant of the mystery that was preordained (*Prov.*, 10.58–61). As we observed in Anastasios, the betrayal of Judas became a trope in Christian discussions concerning providence and divine foreknowledge.

We turn now to John of Damascus, the most *original* Byzantine thinker of the eighth century. We use italics because he has been unjustly treated as unoriginal in the past. Naturally, original here is relative to the traditional patristic framework within which he worked, as he himself states in the prooimion to his *Dialectica*, the first part of his tripartite *Font of Knowledge* (*Πηγὴ Γνώσεως / Pege gnoesos*), but he is far from merely a synthesizer of Chalcedonian dogma and an exponent of the emerging encyclopedism. By John's time the Council in Trullo of 692 had enshrined, in Canon 19, the need for bishops and teachers to eschew innovation and adhere to the *consensus patrum*.²³ The Aristotelian dimension to John's thought is demonstrated in his *Dialectica*, undoubtedly the most philosophically informed "textbook" of the period and essential for understanding the reception of Greek philosophical vocabulary in Palestine in the early eighth century. In it he makes explicit what often remained implicit in earlier Christian thinkers.

If Maximos was in the thick of the theological controversies of his time, John remained on the periphery in Palestine under the Umayyad caliphate, and was only indirectly involved in the first phase of the Byzantine Iconoclast controversy. It is likely that John was asked to write against the Iconoclasts because of his location outside Byzantine imperial territory. In his *Three Orations* in defense of icons, he lists as a type of image what has been determined from before the ages (*προαιωνίως / proaionios*) by the will of God. What God has planned will come to pass at the time that has been appointed by him. He says that these images and paradigms of things yet to happen are called predeterminations by Dionysios (*Third Oration* 19). For Dionysios and John, these predeterminations exist in the mind of God and signify God's foreknowledge, while for Maximos they are the preexisting creative principles (*logoi*) of God (*Amb.* 7).

In his *De fide orthodoxa*, the third part of his *Font of Knowledge*, John remarks that God is the artificer (*τεχνίτης / technites*) of his creation, who preserves and governs it, always maintaining and providing for it (*DFO* 1.3). In his discussion of providence, he says that what happens as a result of it is the best that could happen. He distinguishes what depends on providence and what depends on free choice, and it is those things that depend upon us that belong to choice. He further distinguishes two ways that providence operates, either by favor (*εὐδοκία / eudokia*) or by

²³ Parry 2006: 225.

concession (παράχωρησις / *parachoresis*): the first covers all things that are good while the second is many-sided. It is in this latter category that he places misfortune visited on the virtuous and good fortune on the villainous (*DFO* 2.29). It was this category of unjust deserts that was important for establishing a viable theodicy.²⁴ Maximos had suggested in his *Questiones et dubia* 19 that God wills in three ways, and two of them, favour and concession, were taken up by John.

John goes on to state that God wills all to be saved as well as punishing sinners. The first he describes as antecedent will (προηγούμενον θέλημα / *proegoumenon thelema*) and favour, and the second as consequent will (ἐπόμενον θέλημα / *epomenon thelema*) and concession. With the first, God is the cause, but with the second we are the cause. With the latter there is dispensation for our instruction and abandonment for our chastisement. However, these are not dependent upon us. For those things that do depend upon us, the good things he wills beforehand, whereas the evil things he neither wills beforehand nor as a consequence, but allows them as acts of free choice (*DFO* 2.29). In other words, God is absolved from responsibility for our evil actions but takes credit for our good ones. In addition John distinguishes divine foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις / *prognosis*) from predetermination (προορισμός / *proorismos*): God foreknows things that depend on us, but he does not predetermine them because he does not will us to do evil or coerce us to do good (*DFO* 2.30). There is no compulsion on the part of God, although he wants what is best for us. The difference between God's primary antecedent will and his secondary consequent will is that the first concerns goodness and preservation, while the second pertains to chastisement and judgment. He further elaborates on the difference in his *Dialogue against the Manichaeans* (79.15–17).

In dealing with free will (αὐτεξούσιος / *autexousios*), that is, with what depends on us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν / *eph' hemin*), John says there are three points to consider: (a) the denial that anything depends on us; (b) what does depend on us and is within our control; and (c) why God has granted us free will. In response to the first, he focuses on the claim that all things are caused by either God, necessity, fate, nature, chance, or spontaneity, but none of these, he says, explains the fact that humans are free agents acting autonomously. On the second, he says that things which depend on us are done voluntarily as acts of deliberation (βουλή / *boule*) in relation to contingents, but although what we choose to do rests with us, divine providence sometimes intervenes to prevent it. In answer to the third, he says that free will is connected by nature with reason, so rational beings such as human beings are masters of their

²⁴ Demetracopoulos 2012.

actions, whereas animals (ἄλογα / *aloga*) are not (DFO 25–27).²⁵ The free will granted to human beings gave rise to the act of disobedience that saw them fall into sin, which he defines as a deviation from what is natural to what is unnatural. To this he adds that evil is not a substance, nor a property of a substance, but an accident (DFO 4.20). In discussing further the nature of evil John uses (via Dionysios) the Proclan term *parhypostasis* to indicate that it has no independent existence (*Dialogue Against the Manichaeans* 1.64).

For John the virtues are natural to us because they are God-given. When we follow what is natural to us (κατὰ φύσιν / *kata physin*) we are in a state of virtue, but when we go against what is natural to us (παρὰ φύσιν / *para physin*) we enter into vice (DFO 2.30). John follows Maximos in speaking of virtues being inherent in us naturally, even though not all of us act naturally. It was due to the Fall that we went from what is according to nature to what is against it. What is according to nature, says John, is what is meant by the expression “according to the image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26). In keeping with the Greek patristic tradition, John maintains that with the Fall the likeness was lost but the image was retained. He goes on to say that asceticism and the discipline associated with it is intended not for the acquisition of virtue (given that virtue is not extraneous to us), but for the expulsion of evil, which has been introduced and is against nature (DFO 3.14). John’s theology of asceticism is taken verbatim from Maximos’ *Disputation with Pyrrhos*,²⁶ and is introduced in the context of his discussion of the wills and energies in Christ. It is not surprising that he treats this topic given the recent disruption caused by the Monothelete controversy and its repercussions in the eighth century.

CONCLUSION

By the eighth century, the topics of providence, fate, and free choice were being hotly contested in the Arab caliphate among the *mutakallimūn*. Muslim thinkers took up the debate in terms of their own monotheistic faith, continuing the discourse that had come through from antiquity. It continued also in the Syriac Christian world with Joseph Hazzaya in the eighth century and Cyriacus of Tagrit in the ninth. Also in the ninth century, the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah wrote in Arabic on human free will and divine foreknowledge, while in the Latin west in the same century John Scottus Eriugena composed his *Treatise on Divine Predestination*. It is of interest that an Arabic compilation of the ninth century, based on Diodoros of Tarsos’ lost work on providence and Theodoret of Cyrhus’

²⁵ Frede 2002. ²⁶ Parry 2002.

On Providence, was attributed to the Muslim scholar al-Jāḥiẓ.²⁷ In Byzantium, works bearing the title *On Terms of Life* were written by Niketas Stethatos in the eleventh century, and Nikephoros Blemmydes in the thirteenth,²⁸ but it was during the period we have been dealing with that the groundwork was laid down for these later contributions.

²⁷ Treiger 2015b: 450. ²⁸ Beck 1937.

IV.2

ARISTOTELIAN THEMES

CHAPTER 21
LOGIC IN BYZANTIUM

CHRISTOPHE ERISMANN

Logic was continuously studied in Byzantium from patristic times until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Many synopses, paraphrases, commentaries, and treatises were written in Greek, from John of Damascus' *Dialectica* in the eighth century to the extensive logical commentaries by George Scholarios Gennadios in the 1430s.¹ Logic was a part of the general education – the *enkyklios paideia* – and also a topic of scientific inquiry. Logic, the most important philosophical component of the *trivium*, was studied for itself, but also within the teaching of rhetoric. However, the Byzantine history of logic is not limited to the field of philosophy. Logic was also used in theology, in particular during the Iconoclast crisis, and in medical and legal texts. The validity and relevance of using logic in theology was a constant topic of polemical discussions. In the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, there existed strong anti-logical movements.

This chapter does not deal with *Byzantine logic*, but with *logic in Byzantium*. We do not intend to postulate the existence of a properly Byzantine form of logic, which does not in fact exist. Our intention is to study how Byzantine thinkers received, read, commented upon, and sometimes supplemented ancient logic, even if the incomplete state of our knowledge and the large amount of yet unedited texts and glosses allow us to only partially reconstruct this chapter in the history of logic. The logical reflection of Byzantine thinkers was deeply determined by Aristotelian logic. We can sometimes identify terminological choices that are proper to the Christian logical tradition and that go back to the Fathers, but the conceptual framework is basically that provided by the *Organon*. In Byzantium, just as in the Latin west, logic is Aristotelian in nature, as Sten Ebbesen notes: “there was no choice at any time during the Middle Ages between Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian logic. New branches of logic could develop, but however un-Aristotelian they might be to an impartial observer, the Medievals themselves considered them to be supplements to Aristotle's logic, not competing theories.”² In this sense, studying the Byzantine history of logic is, in many ways, the same as

¹ Oehler 1964; Criscuolo 2013; Benakis 2002b; Ierodiakonou 2005a. ² Ebbesen 1992: 167.

studying the relation of Byzantine thought to Aristotelianism. This relation consists of a complex alternation of phases of rejection, due to theological reasons or sympathy for Platonism, and periods of vivid interest. Sofia Kotzabassi notes that

Among one thousand extant Byzantine manuscripts of Aristotle's works, the handbook of his logic, the *Organon* – which includes the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, the *Analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* – is represented by more than one hundred copies written from the tenth to the sixteenth century. Indeed, judging by the number of copies, Aristotle's works were second in popularity only to the Bible and the works of John Chrysostom.³

A CHAPTER IN THE LONG HISTORY OF ARISTOTELIAN LOGIC

The Byzantine contribution to the study of logic consists first and foremost in the exegesis of the *Organon*. The standard content of a course in logic covered Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, as well as Aristotle's *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics* (only chapters 1.1–7).⁴ This means that Byzantine authors faced the numerous philosophical issues that were considered in these texts and had to deal with some fundamental claims about the logical and ontological structure of the sensible world. The two main principles are, first, that an individual is constituted of a substance and of accidental properties and, second, that the world is made up of members of natural kinds. Summarized in brief, the philosophical matter discussed in the logical books is the following: in the *Eisagoge*, Porphyry raises the issue of the ontological status of universal entities, i.e. genera and species, without providing a single answer, but offering a list of alternatives, ranging from them being mere concepts to having an existence either separated from or instantiated by individuals.⁵ He also puts forth a division of substance into genera and species through specific differences in a particular form which is called Porphyry's tree and was to become canonical, and a theory that explains the individuality of individuals by the fact that each of them possesses a unique bundle of accidental properties (*ἄθροισμα ἰδιοτήτων* / *athroisma idioteton*).⁶ Aristotle's *Categories*⁷ provides a network of concepts that are useful to reasoning in logic and in ontology: (1) the criteria of inherence and predication (*being in* and *being said of*); (2) the ontological square, i.e. the exhaustive classification of beings into: (a) particular or primary substances, for example Peter and Paul; (b) universal or secondary substances, for example the species cat and

³ Kotzabassi 2002: 51–52; Hunger 1978: 14–15. ⁴ Eleuteri 1995: 441; Constantinides 1982.

⁵ Chiaradonna 2008.

⁶ Chiaradonna 2000. On the Christian acceptance of this model, see Erismann 2008.

⁷ Jansen 2007.

tortoise; (c) particular accidents, for example *this* white, and (d) universal accidents, for example the colour red; (3) the distinction between primary (particular) and secondary (universal) substances; (4) the distinction between essential and accidental properties; and (5) the classification of the latter into nine categories: quantity, quality, relatives, place, time, position, having, doing, and being affected. Aristotle's *De interpretatione* covers the theory of proposition, including the quantity of propositions, the logical square, and the questions of truth, contingent futures, and modalities. The *Prior Analytics* provides an introduction to syllogistic. The other texts of the *Organon* – in particular the *Posterior Analytics* – did not belong to the standard logical education, but were the object of further study.

Thus the content of a Byzantine course in logic is clearly Aristotelian. Yet the reading and interpretation of Aristotle were influenced from two sides: Neoplatonic exegesis and the Christian patristic tradition of logic.

We can say that, given the strong influence of Neoplatonic commentators, the Aristotle who was studied in Byzantium was that of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. Byzantine thinkers read Aristotle through the lens of the exegesis of Porphyry, Ammonios, Simplikios, Philoponos, and Olympiodoros.⁸ As a result, Byzantine thinkers frequently accepted the main results of the Alexandrian Neoplatonic exegesis of Aristotle. The most striking example is the influential Neoplatonic theory of the three states of universals,⁹ which are the following: (1) the universals before the many (πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν / *pro ton pollon*): these are a revised version of the Platonic forms, interpreted as the models, the creative *logoi* or ideal paradigms, which subsist in the demiurge's intellect or in the mind of God (in the Christianized version of the doctrine); (2) the universals in the many (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς / *en tois pollois*): the forms that are immanent in the individuals; and (3) the universals after the many (ἐπι τοῖς πολλοῖς / *epi tois pollois*): the abstract concepts of immanent forms.¹⁰

⁸ In early Byzantine times, the following commentaries were certainly available. On Porphyry's *Isagoge*: Ammonios (CAG IV.3), pseudo-Philoponos (in various manuscripts), David (XVIII.2), Elias (XVIII.1), pseudo-Elias (ed. Westerink). On Aristotle's *Categories*: Porphyry (IV.1), Dexippos (IV.2), Simplikios (VIII), Ammonios (IV.4), Philoponos (XIII.1), Elias (XVIII.1), Olympiodoros (XII.1). On Aristotle's *De interpretatione*: Ammonios (IV.5), Stephanos (XVIII.3), Anonymous Tarán. On Aristotle's *Analytica priora*: Alexander of Aphrodisias (II.1), Ammonios (IV.6), Philoponos (XIII.2), and a late ancient anonymous commentary (ms. Paris BNF Gr. 2061).

⁹ For a formulation of this doctrine, see for example Proklos, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* 50:16–51:6. On the Byzantine reception of this theory, see Benakis 1982.

¹⁰ Ammonios (c. 435/445–517/526), who held a chair of philosophy in Alexandria, introduces, in his commentary on Porphyry (*In Porphyrii Isagogen* 41:10–20), the Neoplatonic theory of the three states of universals as follows: "In order to explain what [Porphyry's] text means, let us present it by an example, for it is not true that [philosophers] refer simply and by chance to some things as bodies, to others as incorporeals, but they do this after reasoning, and they do not contradict each other, for each of them says reasonable things. Imagine a ring with a seal [representing] for example Achilles, and a number of

Another important point that Byzantine thinkers inherited from late ancient philosophy is the awareness of a strong link between logic and physics, from both an exegetical and a theoretical point of view. From the standpoint of exegesis, the *Organon* and the *Physics* were the most favourably received Aristotelian texts and those most studied by Neoplatonic authors. From the viewpoint of theory, logic and physics were taken to be complementary fields in the analysis of the sensible world. Byzantine *epitomai* of Aristotelian philosophy, such as those of Nikephoros Blemmydes and George Scholarios, often concentrated on logic and physics.

The second determining factor is the Christian tradition of logic. Two stages during which Aristotelian logic was gradually adapted by Christian theologians should be mentioned here. The first is the influential rethinking of Aristotelian logical terminology by the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century. Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa's acceptance of the distinction between primary and secondary substances as being, respectively, particular and universal entities is one of the main characteristics of the use of Aristotelian logic by Christian thinkers of late antiquity. This distinction is reformulated by naming the individuals, i.e. the primary substances according to Aristotle, "hypostases." In contrast to the Latin notion of *persona* that Boethius applies only to rational beings, hypostases can be predicated of individuals of any natural kind: this horse, for example, is a hypostasis.¹¹ Aristotle's secondary substances, now merely called substances, are common entities, referred to by the term *ousia*. The extension of this last term is drastically reduced as individuals are no longer named *ousia*. *Ousia* is common, and therefore unique to all the members of a given species, whereas hypostases are multiple. The concept of *ousia* is thus deeply rethought. Redefined in this way, *ousia* refers no longer to the concrete individual reality, but to the common essence. This

pieces of wax; suppose that the ring imprints its seal into all the pieces of wax; suppose now that someone comes later and looks at the pieces of wax and notices that all [the imprints] come from the same seal; he, in himself, will have the mark, that is, the imprint, in his discursive faculty; so we can say that the seal on the ring is 'before the multiple,' the imprint in the wax is 'in the multiple,' and the one which is in the discursive faculty of him who imprints it is 'after the multiple' and 'posterior in the order of being'; this is what must be understood in the case of genera and species." In the following part of the text (41:20–42:26), Ammonios applies the distinction of the three modes of being of universals to the case of the universal man; the demiurge has, in his mind, the idea of the universal man, which is the archetypal paradigm for the creation of particular men. The universals before the multiple are intelligible substances that precede the sensible individuals. The universal man is also understood as the form of man which is, according to Ammonios, the same for all the individuals of the species: πάντες τὸ αὐτὸ εἶδος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔχουσιν. This form is inseparable from the sensible individuals. Finally, after having observed several men, we form, by abstraction, in our mind the concept of man on the basis of the common characteristics shared by all men. This concept is posterior (ὕστερογενής) to the individuals.

¹¹ John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 43 (p. 108:5–7): "[Hypostasis] signifies the individual, that which is numerically different, which is to say Peter, Paul, this horse." See also Chapter 25.

is highlighted by the introduction of another term, which is foreign to the traditional vocabulary of logic, namely *nature* (*physis*), which is often presented as being synonymous with *ousia*.¹²

The second stage consists of the Christological controversies in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) between the partisans of Chalcedonian Christology and their Miaphysite opponents who both used and supplemented Aristotelian logic. This led to technical debates on the nature of individuality and the relation between individuals and species. Using the vocabulary that was initiated by the Cappadocians, the debate focused on the mode of nature's being in the hypostasis. As a rule, both sides accepted a principle that originated in Aristotle: *there is no such thing as a nature that is not hypostasized*.¹³ The diversity of opinions was mainly related to the mode of being of the human nature of Christ which was said, by the partisans of Chalcedonian Christology, to be "enhypostasized," that is realized in a hypostasis. From Maximos the Confessor onwards, this concept was extended to characterize the mode of being of specific universals: "That which is enhypostasized never exists by itself, but is considered in others, like the species is considered in the individuals that are subordinate to it."¹⁴ This was to become a central concept in Byzantine discussions of universals.

The patristic tradition of logic was well known to the Byzantines who inherited from it a vocabulary – centered on the notion of hypostasis – and theses, notably on the mode of being of specific universals. Photios, Psellos, Blemmydes, and Palamas, among others, were keen to use it. The fact that opuscula by, or attributed to, Maximos the Confessor were frequently copied during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries testifies to the strong interest in his work. The presence of this patristic heritage is one of the original aspects of logical thought in Byzantium. Studying the relation of literati, philosophers, and theologians to logic allows us to explore as well the more general relation they maintained toward rational theological thought. Through syllogistic (συλλογιστική), logic was the basis of scientific thought and demonstrations. This also provides the opportunity for better understanding their relation to Hellenism, as logic was often presented as a *thyrathen* (θύραθεν) philosophical science, i.e. a method developed outside the Church and of pagan origin. It also allows us to highlight the essential role that Byzantine scholars played in the transmission of texts.

¹² E.g. Maximos the Confessor: "Essence and nature are the same thing. Both belong to what is common and universal, insofar as they are predicated of many things that differ in number and insofar as they are never circumscribed in one person": *Opuscula* 14, in *PG* 91:149B.

¹³ Erismann 2011.

¹⁴ Maximos, *Letter* 15 in *PG* 91:557D–640A: δ' ἐνυπόστατον δὲ, τὸ καθ'αὐτὸ μὲν οὐδαμῶς ὑφίστάμενον, ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ θεωρούμενον, ὡς εἶδος ἐν τοῖς ὑπ' αὐτὸ ἀτόμοις.

THE STUDY OF LOGIC IN THE GREEK EAST IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Perhaps more than any other intellectual centre of the time, the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria contributed to the study of Aristotelian logic. The intense exegetical activity of the Alexandrian masters (Ammonios, John Philoponos, Olympiodoros, David, and Elias) enriched the field in the form of philosophically oriented commentaries on the *Organon* supplemented by the *Eisagoge*. Simultaneously, the exegesis of Aristotelian logic started in the Syriac milieu.¹⁵ The first Syriac commentary on an Aristotelian work of logic that we know, the commentary on the *Categories* by Sergius of Reš'aina,¹⁶ was written before 536. Also during the sixth century, Proba composed a commentary on Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and on the *De interpretatione*. Logic continued to be studied in the Greek-speaking east, as testified by the works of Maximos the Confessor (580–662)¹⁷ and the seventh-century introductions to logic.¹⁸ The collections of logical definitions present in theological texts¹⁹ demonstrate the importance of the logical lexicon in Christological discussions (notably the terms: οὐσία / *ousia*, φύσις / *physis*, ὑπόστασις / *hypostasis*, κοινόν / *koinon*, ἴδιον / *idion*, ἰδιώμα / *idioma*, σχέσις / *schesis*, διαφορά / *diaphora*, εἶδος / *eidosis*). Logic was indisputably an important component of Neo-Chalcedonian thought and a central pillar of its apologetics. Remarkable examples are the late sixth-century *Proparaskewe* by Theodore of Raithu²⁰ and the *Doctrina patrum de incarnatione verbi*.²¹ In some cases, such as in Anastasios of Sinai's treatise *Viae Dux*, the section of the text that contains the logical definitions (ch. 2: Ὅροι διάφοροι / *Horoī diaphoroī*) acquired a life of its own and was transmitted independently.²² As noted by Mossman Roueché, "the logical compendia undoubtedly played an important role in the transmission of the Aristotelian tradition during the seventh century: they form the likeliest bridge between the Alexandrian lectures on the one hand and the *Dialectica* of John Damascene on the other."²³

The final stage of the patristic logical tradition is represented by John of Damascus (c. 655–745), who wrote a *Dialectica* or *Capita philosophica*,²⁴ which is a synthesis of the logic of his time. In particular, this text offers

¹⁵ Hugonnard-Roche 2004; Teixidor 2003. ¹⁶ Hugonnard-Roche 1989a; 1989b.

¹⁷ Maximos reveals in various parts of his work a good knowledge of logic. On the logical tools he used, see Törönen 2007: 13–34; Lackner 1962; Erismann 2015.

¹⁸ For a striking example, see Roueché 1980; 1974.

¹⁹ For an overview of the question, see Grillmeier 1987: 82–86.

²⁰ Προπαρασκευή τις καὶ γυμνασία τῶ βουλομένῳ μαθεῖν, in Diekamp 1938: 173–222.

²¹ Ed. Diekamp 1907: ch. 33. ²² See the *descriptio codicum* in Uthemann 1981.

²³ Roueché 1974: 67.

²⁴ On this work, see Oehler 1969; Siclari 1978; Markov 2015; Kontouma 2015. For a discussion of some philosophically relevant aspects of his logic, see Erismann 2010; Zhyrkova 2009; 2010; and see Chapter 25.

a summary of the doctrinal and lexical elements of the *Eisagoge* and *Categories*. Furthermore, the Melchite bishop of Ḥarrān, Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. after 820), although he lived outside the borders of the empire (Syria was lost in 640), remained close to Byzantine thought from an intellectual point of view due to the influence of John of Damascus on him.²⁵ His treatises in Greek and in Arabic are extant, in particular short works of apology of Christianity. One of his Greek works – *Distinction and Clarification of the Terms in which Philosophers Deal, and Refutation of the Mortal Heresy of the Acephalic Severians, that is, the Jacobites* (PG 97:1469–1492)²⁶ – contains an interesting reflection on Aristotelian logic that also makes use of substantial elements of patristic thought.

LOGIC IN FAVOR OF ICONS

The Iconoclast crisis was the major event in the intellectual life of Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries (c. 726–843). In its last phase the debate about religious images and image-worship offers a fascinating case of the use of logic in theological argumentation.²⁷ Three phases of iconophile theory have been identified by P.J. Alexander: the “traditional period,” the “Christological period” beginning under Constantine V in 741, and the “scholastic period” starting some time after the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787.²⁸ In the scholastic period, Aristotelian philosophy, especially logic, was directly applied to the theological problem of images,²⁹ especially in the works of both Theodore the Stoudite and Nikephoros of Constantinople.³⁰ This includes the Aristotelian notion of homonymy, as Christ’s image is said to be Christ homonymously (κατὰ τὸ ὁμώνυμον / *kata to homonymon*), and the theory of relatives (πρός τι / *pros ti*),³¹ drawn from the *Categories*, which is used to express the relation between Christ as the pattern and Christ’s image. Nikephoros, for example, states that

²⁵ Markov 2012.

²⁶ This treatise begins with a clear statement of a theologian’s need to know logic: “Nothing is more necessary, for whomever likes true doctrines and wants to defend them, than a distinction and clarification of the terms with which the philosophers first and foremost deal. Indeed, by lack of precise knowledge of these terms, many people who were thought to be wise missed the target of truth and deviated towards absurd and blasphematory positions” (1470c).

²⁷ On the philosophical background of the controversy, see Mondzain 2005; Parry 1996.

²⁸ Alexander 1958: 189–190. ²⁹ Parry 2013; Anagnostopoulos 2013.

³⁰ According to the detailed testimony of his biographer Ignatios the Deacon, Nikephoros received a good training in Aristotelian logic, starting from the usual definitions of philosophy transmitted by the *prolegomena*, to syllogistic, including the content of the *Categories* (with an explicit reference to homonyms, a key concept in the discussion on icons) and the *On Interpretation*. See Fisher 1998: 54–56.

³¹ On the theory of relational properties developed in the framework of Iconoclasm, see Parry 2013; Erisman 2016.

the image is related to the pattern and is the effect of a cause. Therefore, necessarily it belongs to, and is called, a relative (τῶν πρὸς τι / *ton pros ti*). Relatives are said to be such as they are from their being of some other thing, and through their relation (σχέσει / *schesei*) they are mutual correlatives. A father for instance, is called the son's father . . . thus a pattern is called the pattern of an image and an image the image of a pattern, and nobody will call the image of an individual an unrelated image; for the one and the other are introduced and contemplated together.³²

This use of Aristotle's concept of a relative (πρὸς τι / *pros ti*) is technical in nature, as it implies the exact Aristotelian definition of relatives and the notions of correlative (τὰ ἀντιστρέφοντα / *ta antistrephonta*) and simultaneousness (ἅμα τῆ εἶναι / *hama te einai*). In the same context, Theodore the Stoudite also deploys an Aristotelian theory of universals, stating that "universals have their existence in individuals; for example, humanity in Peter, Paul, and in the other individuals of the same species. If the particulars [i.e. the individual human beings] did not exist, the universal man would be suppressed."³³

THE RENEWAL OF LOGICAL STUDIES IN THE NINTH CENTURY

The ninth century was for Byzantium – as for the Latin west – a period of cultural renewal. This renewal also includes an interest in the foundational texts of logic. During the ninth century, a period that is often referred to as the "first Byzantine Renaissance," a remarkable phenomenon took place: a return to the texts of Aristotle and Porphyry themselves, overcoming the limitation of mediated contact through handbooks and compendia. Whereas patristic thought on logic was an age of compendia and indirect knowledge of Aristotle – John of Damascus, for example, who provided an intelligent synthesis of Aristotle's *Categories*, had probably never read the text itself, but only accounts of it in handbooks – the ninth century returned to the original works by Aristotle and Porphyry. Their texts were read, copied,³⁴ glossed,³⁵ taught,³⁶ and commented upon.

Leo the Mathematician or the Philosopher (c. 790–after 869) taught Aristotelian logic at the imperial school at the Magnaura in Constantinople, probably established some time after 843; but the only surviving works by him are some notes in manuscripts containing Platonic dialogues. Photios (810–893) wrote a number of works on Aristotelian logic.³⁷ He dedicated several of his *Amphilochia* to Porphyry's *Eisagoge* (77) and the *Categories*

³² Nikephoros, *Antirrhethikos* 1.30, in *PG* 100:277C–D; translated in Alexander 1958: 200.

³³ Theodore, *Third Refutation of the Iconoclasts* 1.15, in *PG* 99:396C. See Erismann 2017a.

³⁴ The copying process was hugely facilitated by the invention of the minuscule.

³⁵ The best example is Arethas' scholia. ³⁶ As attested in Photios' *Amphilochia*; see below.

³⁷ Anton 1994.

(137–147).³⁸ His treatment of the *Categories* includes a presentation of the first sections of the *Categories* including the ante-predicaments (137), then a discussion of substance (138), quantity (139), quality (140), relatives (141),³⁹ one paragraph on the remaining categories (142), before coming to action (143), passion (144), place (145), being in a position (146), and the category of when (147). Photios further composed scholia on the *Eisagoge* and *Categories*,⁴⁰ which can be found intertwined with Ammonios' commentaries in various manuscripts (Munich Gr. 222,⁴¹ Paris Gr. 1928, and Escor. Φ III.10). These scholia are probably former versions of the *Amphilochia* reflecting Photios' early teaching activities.

Photios makes various claims about substance that sometimes testify to a critical reading of Aristotle. He holds that the category of substance is homonymous and lacks unity.⁴² Following a long late ancient and early medieval tradition, Photios argues against the unity of the category of substance as expounded by Aristotle. He puts forth two arguments. The first is based on the synonymous predication of the genus. A genus is predicated synonymously, i.e. using the same name and definition, of every entity under it. According to Photios, it is not the case that substance is predicated synonymously of primary and secondary substances. His second line of argumentation is not that of Plotinos, who claimed that intelligible and sensible realities cannot be subsumed under the same genus, but is based on degrees of being and can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Substance does not admit more and less.
- 2 This is true of primary substances, of secondary substances, and of substance understood as the highest genus, i.e. as the category.
- 3 According to Aristotle, primary substances are more substantial than secondary substances.
- 4 3 contradicts 1 and 2.
- 5 Therefore: it is impossible that both primary and secondary substances belong to the same genus.

In a clearly anti-Platonic argument, Photios claims that there are no instantiated properties and therefore no substances prior to individuals (77.3–11). He also states that secondary substances, and more generally universals, do not have causal or constitutive power.⁴³ Furthermore, in his

³⁸ The *Amphilochia* are short works of philosophical or theological content that were written between 867 and 877.

³⁹ Photios discusses quality before relation, inverting the order in the *Categories*.

⁴⁰ Photios' scholia on Porphyry have been edited in Hergenröther 1869; Busse 1891: xxi–xxiii; and D'Aristarchi 1900: 14–30; those on the *Categories* can be found in the footnotes of Hergenröther's edition of the *Amphilochia*, in *PG* 101:757–812.

⁴¹ On this manuscript, see Hajdú 2012: 225–231. ⁴² Bydén 2013.

⁴³ Photios, *Amphilochia* 100:178–184.

Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit, Photios frequently resorts to syllogisms to refute the *Filioque*.

Two students of Photios extended his work on logic. In a short treatise on time, Zacharias of Chalcedon discusses its movability, based on Photios' teachings on logic.⁴⁴ In order to argue that time does not move (ὁ χρόνος οὐ κινεῖται / *ho chronos ou kineitai*), Zacharias uses both the *Categories* and the *Eisagoge* (notably for the concept of specific difference, διαφορὰ / *diaphora*). The first argument is grounded in the Aristotelian distinction of substance and accidents and runs as follows: *Everything moved is a substance. Time is not a substance but an accident. Therefore time is not moved*. The importance Zacharias places on logic is attested by his use of syllogistic formulation and the "reduction" of time to the accidental category of "when." Another student of Photios, Arethas, who became bishop of Caesarea in 907, glossed the texts of the *Eisagoge* and the *Categories* in the manuscript he was using (nowadays Vat. Urb. 35).⁴⁵ This manuscript also happens to be the oldest extant handwritten text containing Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. Arethas' glosses are sometimes detailed and often philosophically rich, quoting the late antique commentators.⁴⁶

Niketas of Byzantium resorts abundantly to logic in his polemical writings against the Muslims. The title of his apology of Christian dogma reads as follows: "An affirmatory argumentative exposition of the Christian doctrine, developed from general concepts (ἐκ κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν / *ek koinon ennoion*) through dialectic method (διαλεκτικῆς μεθόδου / *dialektikes methodou*), rational arguments and multiple logical deductions (συλλογιστικῆς πολυτεχνίας / *sylogistikēs polytechnias*)."⁴⁷

The ninth century was a time of scribes. This is true for philosophy in general and for logic in particular. One of the most important sets of scientific manuscripts, the so-called *Philosophical Collection*,⁴⁸ was copied in Constantinople between 850 and 875 and contains mainly Platonic works, but also some texts dealing with Aristotelian logic. This is all the more the case if, as has been argued,⁴⁹ the manuscript Par. BNF Gr. 2575, a palimpsest containing Simplicios' commentary on the *Categories*, should be included in the collection. The *Philosophical Collection* may provide a direct link between the late school of Alexandria and Byzantium, if we accept the hypothesis that the models from which the manuscripts were copied had been brought to Constantinople at the beginning of the seventh century by Stephanos of Alexandria and were the remains of the library of the last masters of the school of Alexandria. However, this assumption rests on Stephanos' appointment by Herakleios,⁵⁰ which is nowadays questioned.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Ed. Oehler 1957. ⁴⁵ Ed. Share 1994; see also Kotzia-Panteli 1996. ⁴⁶ Anton 1997.

⁴⁷ Ed. Förstel 2000. ⁴⁸ For the unity of the collection, see Ronconi 2011a; 2011b; 2013.

⁴⁹ Cataldi Palau 2001.

⁵⁰ This was first stated by Westerink 1986: lxxvii, and developed by Rashed 2002: 713–717.

⁵¹ Roueché 2012.

Jean Irigoien has postulated the existence of a second philosophical collection containing Aristotelian writings.⁵² This seems possible and there is at least manuscript evidence indicating that logical texts were frequently copied at the end of the ninth century: the Vatican manuscript Urbinas 35 containing the *Organon* was copied around 900. The copying of the *Categories*' commentary contained in the so-called Archimedes Palimpsest took place around the same time.⁵³ This testifies to a vivid interest in Aristotelian logic.

Logical issues came up in many contexts outside the traditional limits of the discipline. The ontological status of individuals and universals was discussed in medical texts as well. For example, the treatise *De natura hominis* ascribed to the ninth-century monk Meletios of the monastery of Tiberiopolis, southwest of Constantinople, is one of the fundamental texts of medical Christian anthropology from the Byzantine period. It contains, in its final section dedicated to the soul,⁵⁴ an analysis of key psychological, logical, and ontological concepts developed by patristic authors. This shows that Meletios was convinced man could be understood only by combining medical, philosophical, and theological approaches. In this, he follows the Galenic recommendation that the good physician must also be a philosopher skilled in logic. His philosophical understanding is accurate, in particular for the logical-ontological dimension. The text includes several definitions and characterizations of *ousia* and *hypostasis* that contain strong ontological statements. There is, for example, the traditional Byzantine definition of substance based on its ontological independence, which understands substance as a self-subsisting reality in no need of others (154.10: πρᾶγμα αὐθύπαρκτον μὴ δεόμενον ἑτέρου πρὸς σύστασιν) and which Meletios makes his own. His definition of hypostasis combines, in a manner hitherto unheard of, Porphyrian elements (bundle of properties, τὸ τῶν συμβεβηκότων ἄθροισμα / *to ton symbebekoton athroisma*) and the concept of being *in actu* (ἐνεργεία / *energeia*), stemming probably from John of Damascus. He offers a particularly telling application of the Porphyrian explanation of individuality through a unique bundle of accidental properties by giving a not very flattering portrait of himself: “the peculiarities of Meletios, who is an individual, cannot be conceived in someone else, for example the fact of being a native of Constantinople (τὸ εἶναι Βυζαντιᾶον / *to einai Byzantiaion*), a doctor, short in height, with blue eyes, a snub nose, having gout and a certain wart on the face, and being the son of Gregory.” In addition to its unusual character, this list is

⁵² Irigoien 1957.

⁵³ The identification of this commentary with Porphyry's *Ad Gegalium* has recently been defended with good arguments: Chiaradonna, Rashed, and Sedley 2013. For the date of the commentary copy, see Netz, Noel, Tchernetska, and Wilson 2011: v. 1, 253–257.

⁵⁴ Ed. in Cramer 1836: 142–157. See also Erismann 2017b and Chapter 15.

interesting because of his effort to find properties belonging to different categories, such as the qualitative property of being a doctor, the quantitative property of being short, the relational property of being the son of Gregory, and a property belonging to the category of having.

The tenth-century encyclopedia *Souda* contains several entries that refer to logic, such as on “categories,” “demonstration (ἀπόδειξις / *apodeixis*),” “species,” and “the same (ταυτόν / *tauton*).” The last entry is interesting for its sources. The entry, summarizing a point first made by Aristotle in the *Topics* (103a7), states that there are three ways to be “the same”: according to genus, for example man and horse are both animals; according to species, for example Plato and Socrates are both men; and according to number, for example things have more than one name, as a specific garment which may be called an overcoat or a cloak. Here, the *Souda* entry is basically a truncated and abridged passage from Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary (58.5–59.5) on the *Topics*.

In 1007 an anonymous text, the so-called Anonymous Heiberg,⁵⁵ was composed that contains a logical section including a brief account of the *Eisagoge*, a synopsis of the *Categories*, the *De interpretatione*, the *Prior Analytics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*.⁵⁶ The section that deals with the *Categories* is very close to the treatise by pseudo-Archytas, *The Ten General Concepts* (Καθολικοί λόγοι δέκα / *Katholikai logoi deka*).

THE GREAT MASTERS OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Beginning in the eleventh century, greater value was accorded to philosophy, and the validity of the use of logic in theology was strongly affirmed. A generation of extremely talented masters, Michael Psellos, John Italos, and Eustratios of Nicaea, argued – admittedly, in different ways – in favor of applying logical reasoning to theological questions. Psellos (1018–c. 1081) was a high-ranking civil servant in the administration of Constantine IX Monomachos and in several successive administrations. A prolific polymath and court intellectual, he directed the school of philosophy of Constantinople until he had to quit this position for political reasons in 1054. He taught the different parts of philosophy, from logic to natural philosophy and metaphysics. He commented on or paraphrased three writings of the *Organon*: the *Categories*,⁵⁷ the *De interpretatione*,⁵⁸ and the *Prior Analytics*.⁵⁹ He also wrote several short treatises discussing selected logical topics, in particular his *Opuscula* 6, 7, 8, and 9 pertaining to the

⁵⁵ Ed. Heiberg 1929. ⁵⁶ The contribution to syllogistics is discussed in Barnes 2002b.

⁵⁷ Scholia attributed to Psellos are found in particular in ms. Par. Gr. 1928.

⁵⁸ The text is accessible in the Venice 1503 Aldine edition: see Ierodiakonou 2002a.

⁵⁹ Psellos’ scholia are preserved in Vat. Gr. 209 and Princeton ms. 173.

Categories.⁶⁰ While developing a theory of illumination and arguing that studying the *Chaldaean Oracles* prepares our mind for grasping the ineffable, Psellos also knew the importance of rational philosophical reflection, logical syllogisms, and demonstrations. He saw in these methods a capacity peculiar to human beings that allowed them to understand reality and the sensible world.⁶¹ In his letter to Xiphilinos, Psellos also stated explicitly that logical reasoning did not conflict with Christian doctrine but that, on the contrary, logical syllogism was an indispensable tool for seeking the truth also in theology.⁶²

John Italos (c. 1025–1082) was a student of Psellos and taught philosophy at the imperial school of Constantinople. He was put on trial and condemned by the Church on charges of having advocated the systematic use of logical reasoning in order to clarify central theological issues.⁶³ The first of the eleven anathemas against Italos that were added to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* (the official catalogue of heresies condemned by the Church) mentions the application of logical arguments to theological issues such as the Incarnation of Christ and the relation between Christ's two natures. In a most unflattering portrait that she gave of Italos in her *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene nevertheless admitted that John Italos was better at interpreting Aristotle's logic than anyone else.⁶⁴ Italos composed a commentary on the second, third, and fourth books of Aristotle's *Topics*,⁶⁵ two small treatises on dialectic and on Aristotelian syllogisms,⁶⁶ and the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*,⁶⁷ a collection of answers to ninety-three philosophical questions raised by his students, many of which focus on logical and metaphysical topics.⁶⁸ A further contribution to logic by Italos can be found in his *Opuscula*. There, he also discusses issues of logic pertaining to the corporeality of genera and species, the mode of being of universal entities, and substance and accidents, and he often refers to Aristotle and Porphyry.

Italos' solution to the problem of universals is interesting in two ways. First, it offers one of the clearest Byzantine formulations of ontological particularism, i.e. of the thesis that everything that exists is particular. He holds that essential properties are made particular by their inherence in individuals; genera and species have no existence separate from individuals. Second, he formulates his solution in the framework of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the three states of universals and uses the originally patristic vocabulary of hypostasis and related concepts which were

⁶⁰ Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1. The *Opuscula* 50, 51, and 52 which are attributed to Psellos in some manuscripts are considered dubious by Duffy, mainly for stylistic reasons.

⁶¹ See, for example, Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 27d–28b; and see Ierodiakonou 2007.

⁶² Ed. Criscuolo 1990: 52.109–53.118. ⁶³ Clucas 1981. ⁶⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 5.8.

⁶⁵ Ed. Kotzabassi 1999. ⁶⁶ Ed. Cereteli 1924–1926. ⁶⁷ Ed. Joannou 1956b.

⁶⁸ Niarchos (1978) has suggested that Italos may be the author of three commentaries on Porphyry; however, Linos Benakis has raised doubts about this attribution.

both – the second even more so than the first – tools traditionally applied for defending a realist position. The most noticeable aspect of Italos' ontology is the fact that he thinks that immanent universals – genera and species “in the multiple” – exist as particulars, not as universals. This sets him clearly apart from the realism of species in its patristic version. A passage from *Opusculum* 52 states explicitly that the “genera in the multiple” exist in the multiple as particulars and individuals (ὅθεν καὶ μερικά τέ ἐστι καὶ ἄτομα).⁶⁹

In *Opusculum* 7, Italos reconsiders a definition of substance traditional in Byzantine thought,⁷⁰ which states that essence is a thing that exists by itself and does not need anything else for its constitution (οὐσία ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα αὐθύπαρκτον μὴ δεόμενον ἑτέρου πρὸς σύστασιν). He considers the issue of what it means to say that essence needs nothing else in order to exist. Italos wishes to guarantee the validity of the definition while not limiting its application to the first cause alone and, at the same time, ensuring that it remains valid “for the things that subsist in generation and corruption.” He follows Psellos in stating that the concept of *authyparktos* is homonymous. His solution is to consider the part of the definition which postulates that substance needs nothing else. What is this other thing that substance does not need? In his answer, Italos returns to the fundamental distinction between substance and accident. He chooses to bring the concept of accident back into the definition and to reduce the independence of substance to the independence from accidents. He explains his solution as follows:

Substance is said to be self-subsisting, not because it is independent and needs absolutely nothing else, but only because it does not need accidents: the realities that are “other” are not substances; however, the realities which [substance] needs are substances and not accidents; for this reason the doctrine states that [substance] is self-subsisting, insofar as it does not need accidents in order to exist; and this is true, since it is clear that substance contributes to the being of accidents; and, if this is the case, how could it need them, since it gave them being?⁷¹

The solution is to distinguish two types of dependence: dependence on other substances and dependence on accidents. What the definition rejects is, according to Italos, not the dependence on other substances but only on accidents. The thesis of substance's dependence on accidents would have the consequence that substance and accidents would be dependent upon one another for existence and that they could not exist separately from one another. This consequence is absurd, because an accident can disappear

⁶⁹ Ed. Joannou 1956b: 70:37–71:2.

⁷⁰ It was mentioned by Maximos the Confessor, John of Damascus, Photios, the *Souda*, and the Anonymous Heiberg.

⁷¹ Ed. Joannou 1956b: 7:23–29.

without entailing the disappearance of the subject in which it inheres. However, Italos does not exclude that substances may depend on other substances, thus preserving divine causality, hylomorphism, generation, and essentialism.

Eustratios (c. 1050–1120) was the metropolitan of Nicaea at the beginning of the twelfth century. As a disciple of Italos, he was strongly convinced of the correctness of using Aristotle's syllogistic in theology. In one of the theses for which he was condemned for heresy in 1117, he even maintained that in the Gospels Christ had applied Aristotelian syllogisms.⁷² In his theological treatises, Eustratios attempted to prove the truth of Christian dogma by using logical arguments grounded in series of syllogisms. When he had to refute the monophysitism of Tigranes, he did not hesitate to provide a logical interpretation of the issue of the two natures of Christ and insisted that the theological distinction between person and nature should be understood in the light of the philosophical distinction between an individual and a universal. He was the author of two commentaries on Aristotle, one on the first and sixth books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,⁷³ and the other on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*, the first Byzantine commentary on this text.⁷⁴ Eustratios played an important historical role, in particular due to his influence on Latin thought which was, inter alia, advanced by the Latin translation of his commentary on the *Ethics* by Robert Grosseteste. Beside Avicenna, he was one of the transmitters of the Neoplatonic theory of the three states of universals, and linked the problem of universals to the discussion of wholes and parts. On this he was to influence Albertus Magnus.

In his commentary on *Posterior Analytics* B13 (96b23), Eustratios introduces a particularly interesting reflection on the distinction between genera and species, granting each of them a different ontological status.⁷⁵ Attributing a peculiar status to species was not in itself unheard of, even if this position was far from being unanimous. Already in the *Categories* Aristotle had stated that species is more substantial than genus because in logical order it is closer to the individuals. The patristic logical tradition also valued species, which was taken to be the real *ousia*, synonymous with nature. Eustratios' contribution went further. According to him, genera have no existence; they are *anhypostata*, while species, understood as

⁷² The 24th condemned thesis stated that, throughout the Gospels, Christ uses Aristotelian syllogisms: ὅτι πανταχοῦ τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ θεῶν λογίων ὁ Χριστὸς συλλογίζεται ἀριστοτελικῶς; Joannou 1952: 34.

⁷³ See the studies dedicated to him in Barber and Jenkins 2009.

⁷⁴ Ed. Hayduck 1907; see Ierodiakonou 2010. On Eustratios' ontology and logic, see Lloyd 1987; Joannou 1954a; 1954b; Ierodiakonou 2005a.

⁷⁵ Ed. Hayduck 1907: 194.

substantial forms realized in individuals, subsist. The *eide* ("species") subsist not as separated universals, but instantiated in individuals. Genera are mere concepts (*ennoemata*) because they comprise species which cannot realize them in the same way as individuals realize species.

Exegetical activity on logic continued during the twelfth century. Michael of Ephesos, a member of the circle of intellectuals gathered around Anna Komnene and involved in her project of commenting on Aristotle's works, wrote a commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* which was wrongly attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias.⁷⁶ Theodore Prodromos (c. 1100–c. 1170) offered an extensive commentary on the second book of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*,⁷⁷ heavily influenced by Eustratios' commentary. He also composed two short treatises on logic, a brief dialogue on themes from Porphyry's *Eisagoge* called *Xenedemos*, and a synthetic essay *On "Great" and "Small."*⁷⁸ This essay contains a series of arguments in favor of the thesis that "great" and "small" and "much" and "little" are quantities, and against Aristotle's claim in the sixth chapter of the *Categories* (5b26–29) that they are relatives (*pros ti*). It further supports the claim denied by Aristotle (6a8–11) that "great" and "small," and "much" and "little," are contraries. It is also worth mentioning that John Tzetzes wrote a commentary on Porphyry in 1,700 lines of verse which is extant in the Vienna manuscript phil. Gr. 300 (fols. 63r–81r).

RECONSTRUCTING THE TRADITION OF STUDIES IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The conquest and sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 resulted in the brutal cessation of studies, the partial destruction of scholarly structures, and the loss of a large, but hard to estimate, number of texts.⁷⁹ Teaching was reorganized with some difficulty in the empire of Nicaea (1204–1261). The emblematic philosopher of this exile was Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–1269). Thanks to his autobiography,⁸⁰ which is an exceptional document and an important testimony to his education and intellectual career, we can imagine the difficulties which students had to overcome at Nicaea: they had to compensate for both the lack of books and the lack of qualified masters. We know that from the age of sixteen onwards (c. 1209) Blemmydes studied logic, namely the *Eisagoge*, the *Categories*, and the *De interpretatione* at Nicaea. Then, in order to continue his studies, he had to go to Skamandros where he undertook

⁷⁶ Ed. Wallies 1898. ⁷⁷ Cacouros 1994–1995. ⁷⁸ Tannery 1887.

⁷⁹ As Wilson (1983: 218) notes: "The Fourth Crusade put an end to the survival of a quantity of literature which is difficult to estimate."

⁸⁰ Blemmydes, *A Partial Account* 44, 47–48, 97–103.

philosophical studies in syllogistics, that is, the first two books of the *Prior Analytics* and the *Physics*. His major philosophical work is an *Epitome logica* in two books, the first on logic and the second on physics; the first version of this book was written in 1237–1239 and the final version in c. 1260. In the prooimion, Blemmydes insists that the science of logic is useful for the study of Scripture. He also justifies the study of logic by stating that it is the best means to approach truth and, since God is truth, approaching truth means approaching God. His *Epitome* offers a systematic exposition of Aristotelian logic starting with a summary of Porphyry's *Eisagoge* (chs. 1–13), a paraphrase of the *Categories* (chs. 14–25), a short summary of the *De interpretatione* (chs. 26–30), the *Prior Analytics* (chs. 31–36), and the *Sophistical Refutations* (chs. 37–39), before concluding with remarks on syllogisms and sophistic proofs (ch. 40).⁸¹ The part on logic of the (as yet unedited) *Synopsis variarum disciplinarum* of Joseph Rhakendytes (1260/80–1330) reproduces Blemmydes' *Epitome logica* with some additions. During the thirteenth century, Leo Magentinos glossed the *Organon*, George Pachymeres (1242–c. 1310) wrote an *Epitome* of Aristotle's logic, and a further scholar, identified as Sophonias by M. Hayduck (*CAG* XXIII.2), paraphrased the *Categories*. Moreover Boethius' *De hypotheticis syllogismis* and *De topicis differentiis* were translated into Greek and commented upon by Manuel Holobolos, who taught logic at the patriarchal school between 1265 and 1273.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

During the fourteenth century, logic was criticized in a similar manner as during the condemnations of Italos and Eustratios.⁸² Nikephoros Gregoras (1290/3–1358/61) argued that logical studies should be dismissed.⁸³ Logic was regarded as useless because the kind of knowledge it led to was not knowledge of real things, but only of sensible objects that were mere images of reality and not reality itself.⁸⁴ But both Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290–1348) and Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) offered defenses of logic and considered its application to theology as useful. Thanks to his biographer Philotheos Kokkinos, we know that Palamas studied the entire corpus of Aristotle's works and that from an early age he impressed people with his competence in logic, which he was taught by Theodore Metochites.⁸⁵ In his *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters on Topics of Natural*

⁸¹ *PG* 142:688–1104; see Uthemann 1984. ⁸² Ierodiakonou 2002b. ⁸³ Bydén 2012a.

⁸⁴ Gregoras, *Antirrhethika* I, 2.4.291.14. Gregoras also criticizes Aristotle on a precise point of chapter 7 of the *Categories*, the issue of the simultaneity of correlatives. Aristotle admits that the objects of knowledge and perception exist prior to their correlative states of mind, thereby infringing the rule of the simultaneity of relatives that he himself has stated: Gregoras, *Florentius* in Leone 1975: 1534–1554.

⁸⁵ Philotheos Kokkinos, *Encomium of Gregory Palamas* II, in Tsames 1985: 427–591.

and *Theological Science, the Moral and the Ascetic Life, Intended as a Purge for the Barlaamite Corruption*,⁸⁶ which he wrote at a mature age in 1349/50, Palamas reflects on the categories and their application to theological issues. He accepts the categories' validity for the sensible world: "all beings as well as those realities that are subsequently observed in substance can be included within ten categories (εἰς δέκα συγκεφαλαιουμένων / *eis deka synkephalaioumenon*), namely substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, action, affection, possession and situation."⁸⁷ This list reflects the one in the *Categories* (1b26–27). Palamas also discusses the application of the categories to God. According to him, three categories are relevant for God, namely substance (οὐσία / *ousia*), relation (πρός τι / *pros ti*), and action (ποιεῖν / *poiein*): "God is a hypersubstantial substance (οὐσία ὑπερούσιος / *ousia hyperousios*) in which only relation and action are observed (μόνα τὸ πρὸς τί τε καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν / *mona to pros ti te kai to poiein*), and these do not produce any composition or alteration within it."⁸⁸ God is substance, but Palamas immediately qualifies this by an adjective reminiscent of pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, namely *hyperousios*. God transcends the category of substance. Relation is taken to be applicable to God because the hypostases of the Trinity are distinct from one another, yet not distinct in substance. In God the hypostatic properties (τὰ ὑποστατικά ἰδιώματα / *ta hypostatika idiomata*) are referred to as mutual relations (πρὸς ἄλληλα λέγεται / *pros allela legetai*). Relation is important given that, without it, the Trinity would not exist. In Palamas' own words: "The trihypostatic character of the Godhead is eliminated if relation is not observed in God's substance."⁸⁹ Relation is also necessary in order to understand the creative activity of God: "He is also Creator, principle, and master in relation to creation in that it has its origin in him and is dependent on him."⁹⁰ On this basis, Palamas introduces a strong and original thesis, which also constitutes an attack against his adversaries: "Those who assert that God is substance alone with nothing observed in him are representing God as having neither creation and operation nor relation."⁹¹ This is a grave mistake, as it is equivalent to rejecting God's mastery over the universe. By refusing to recognize in God anything but substance, the Akindynists (Palamas' opponents, followers of Akindynos) eliminated both the three hypostases and the divine economy. The Aristotelian category of action is completely rethought by Palamas and the accidental dimension of the category is left aside. According to him, action includes producing (*demiourgein*) and acting (*energein*). Insofar as it expresses the demiurgic creative activity, it applies to God: "But creating

⁸⁶ Text and translation in Sinkewicz 1988; for dating, see 49–54.

⁸⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Capita 150* 134 (ed. Sinkewicz 1988: 238:1–3). ⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 134 (238.3–5).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 132, 134 (238.19–240.21). ⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 134 (238.6–8). ⁹¹ *Ibid.* 134 (238.12–14).

and acting (ποιεῖν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν / *poiein kai energein*) should be attributed in the truest sense to God alone.⁹² The idea that logical tools allow us to understand this is coherent with Palamas' epistemological thesis, according to which we contemplate God through illumination but we understand God's activities through reason.

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, A TIME OF TRANSITION

Gennadios Scholarios (1385/90–after 1472) was named patriarch of Constantinople by sultan Mehmed II. Probably for teaching purposes, he commented on three texts of Aristotelian logic: the *Eisagoge*, *Categories*, and *De interpretatione*.⁹³ The most remarkable aspect of his interest in this field is his ambitious project to translate into Greek logical textbooks and commentaries from the western Scholastic tradition. In particular, he translated pseudo-Gilbert of Poitiers' *Liber de sex principiis*, Peter of Spain's *Summulae logicales* (yet without the treatise on fallacies), pseudo-Aquinas' *De fallaciis*,⁹⁴ and Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, the translation of which is unfortunately lost. As shown by Sten Ebbesen and Jan Pinborg, Gennadios' logical commentaries strongly depend on Latin sources, in particular on the *Quaestiones super artem veterem* of Radulphus Brito (c. 1270–c. 1320), who taught Aristotelian logic at the University of Paris around the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁹⁵ Scholarios also attacked Plethon. In his *Contra Plethonis ignorantem de Aristotele*, he sought to defend Aristotelian philosophy against Plethon's attacks, contained in the latter's 1439 treatise *On Aristotle's Departures from Plato (De differentiis)*.⁹⁶ Bessarion was also engaged against Plethon, in particular in a short work on the Aristotelian concept of substance (περὶ οὐσίας / *peri ousias*),⁹⁷ a theme on which Theodore of Gaza was also to take position. However, Bessarion no doubt exerted his greatest influence by importing Greek philosophy into Renaissance thought, both through his writings and through his extraordinary collection of manuscripts, which he left to the Republic of Venice. The inventories that were made of his library in 1474 and 1524 mention numerous logical manuscripts – copies of the *Organon*, the works of its commentators, for example Porphyry and Ammonios, and contributions of Byzantine scholars such as Italos.⁹⁸

⁹² *Ibid.* 133 (238.2–3).

⁹³ These commentaries are edited in Scholarios, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 7, respectively 7–113, 114–237, and 238–348.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* v. 8, respectively, pp. 338–350, 283–337, and 255–282.

⁹⁵ Ebbesen and Pinborg 1981–1982; see Ierodiakonou 2011b. ⁹⁶ Lagarde 1973.

⁹⁷ Mohler 1942: v. 2, 149–150. ⁹⁸ These inventories have been edited by Labowsky 1979.

CHAPTER 22

THE PRESENCE OF ARISTOTLE
IN BYZANTINE THEOLOGY

DAVID BRADSHAW

Any attempt to survey the place of Aristotle within Byzantine theology must begin by recognizing that the category of “Byzantine theology” is itself a modern construction. The Byzantines did not think of themselves as Byzantines, but as Romans. This fact is not merely a matter of nomenclature, but a reminder of their strong sense of continuity with the classical and early Christian past. As regards theology, in particular, the Byzantines saw no sharp line dividing their own times from the foundational era of Christianity. Although they recognized the authority of the Church Fathers, they did not think in terms of a closed and completed “age of the Fathers.”¹ The holy and God-bearing Fathers (as the Byzantines would have called them) were not limited to a particular time or place, but included all who had faithfully received and expounded the True Faith, particularly in response to heresy. From the Byzantine standpoint – which remains that of the Eastern Orthodox Church today – such persons will never cease to be found within the Church, for they constitute the living seal of its guidance by the Holy Spirit.

To understand the role of Aristotle within Byzantine theology, then, one must begin with some sense of his place within early Christian thought. At one level this was rather minimal. Aristotle was never regarded, by either Christians or pagans, as a guide to the spiritual life of the order of Pythagoras or Plato. Several of the Church Fathers found the writings of these latter two so impressive that they supposed these authors must have read the books of Moses during their travels in Egypt.² No one ever made a similar suggestion about Aristotle. When Aristotle is mentioned by the Fathers, it is often for the purpose of denouncing certain of his teachings that they regard as impious, such as the mortality of the soul, the restriction of divine providence to the heavens, and the view that human happiness depends upon

¹ See Chapter 17.

² Justin Martyr, *Apology I* 59–60; pseudo-Justin, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 22, 25–27, 29, 31–33; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.15, 1.25, 5.14; Eusebios of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 10.4, and books 11–12; Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* 1.18. (For purposes of this chapter I will use the term “Church Fathers” to indicate those who are usually so regarded within western scholarship. This is similar, although not quite identical, to the Byzantine usage.)

external goods.³ Occasionally he was also criticized for holding that the universe is eternal and uncreated, although since this view was widespread in antiquity it was not always associated specifically with Aristotle. Apart from his erroneous teachings, Aristotle was also viewed with suspicion because of his founding of logic, a field all too often employed (and abused) by heretics, such as by the “neo-Arian” Aetios in the fourth century. When Gregory of Nazianzos remarks that he writes of the Trinity “in the manner of fishermen, not the manner of Aristotle,” his statement has a dual meaning: it indicates both that he has spoken plainly and without unnecessary technicalities, and that he has spoken honestly without sophistical deceptions.⁴

Yet this is far from the whole story. Whatever their antipathy toward Aristotle, early Christian authors were also participants in a culture in which Aristotelian ideas had long ago become commonplace. They were perfectly comfortable drawing upon such ideas, although typically without acknowledgement, or perhaps even awareness, of their Aristotelian provenance. Without attempting anything like a complete catalog, it is worth noting a few examples of such indirect borrowing before advancing into the Byzantine era. This will be helpful both as a way of exploring the varieties of Aristotelian influence and because the ideas in question remained vitally important for the Byzantines.

One relatively straightforward example is the analysis of created beings into matter and form. By the time of the Church Fathers such analysis had become part of the common stock of ideas shared by the educated. Already in the second century, we find Tatian asserting that God is the creator of both matter and form, a formula that became a standard way of affirming creation *ex nihilo*.⁵ The Fathers generally assumed, in good Aristotelian fashion, that matter is necessary for both change and numerical diversity. Bringing this premise to bear on their decidedly non-Aristotelian belief in the immortality of the soul, as well as their belief in angels, led to a theory known as “pneumatic hylomorphism.” This is the view that all creatures, including angels and souls, are composites of form and matter, although obviously the matter of angels and souls is highly refined in comparison to that of sensible bodies. This view seems to have been more or less universally held in the early Church, particularly since it meshed well with biblical passages such as the parable of Lazarus and the various appearances of angels.⁶ It remained the common view among the Byzantines, who

³ Festugière 1932: 221–263; Runia 1989; and Bradshaw (forthcoming).

⁴ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 23.12.

⁵ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 4–5. See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.10, 2.16.3, 4.20.1; Origen, *On First Principles* 2.1.4; Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 2.2.

⁶ E.g. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 5; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 4, 12–13; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.34; Athanasios, *Life of Antony* 31; Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 8 (probably by Evagrius); Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* 28.31, 38.9; see the discussion in Jacobs 2012.

generally understood it to imply that there are gradations of materiality. John of Damascus, for example, affirms that the angels are “incorporeal and immaterial” in relation to human beings, but “dense and material” in relation to God.⁷

Another important strand of Aristotelian influence – although in this case not one that is solely Aristotelian, but includes Platonic and even pre-Socratic elements – is the patristic understanding of *nous*. This is a term most frequently translated “mind” or “intellect,” although depending on the context it can also mean reason, understanding, thought, judgment, resolve, or disposition.⁸ It appears in Greek philosophy in two closely linked contexts. On the one hand, *nous* is present within each human being as that which thinks or, more specifically, that which apprehends intelligible reality. It is thus the highest faculty of the soul, one that has an innate affinity with divinity. Although this distinctive role of *nous* is already adumbrated by Plato, it is defined most fully by Aristotle, who identifies *nous* as the faculty that apprehends the first principles that are the basis of all subsequent knowledge.⁹ He adds, in light of this, that *nous* is for each of us our truest and highest self.¹⁰ On the other hand, Plato and Aristotle (following Anaxagoras) also give *nous* a cosmic role. In Plato, *nous* is the demiurge who created the world by imposing form upon the Receptacle of Becoming; in Aristotle it is the Prime Mover, which exists eternally at the highest level of actuality and by its “self-thinking thought” gives order to the cosmos.¹¹ Each of the two aspects of *nous*, human and cosmic, enhances the importance of the other. In effect, Plato and Aristotle posit that at the deepest core of the human being lies something divine, a capacity to apprehend and in some sense to share in the Mind that is the source of all things.

This is an exhilarating vision, and it is no wonder that the Church Fathers found it appealing. It has obvious resonances, not only with the Christian belief in the Creator, but with that in humanity as made in the image and likeness of God. Yet it could hardly be adopted wholesale, for in identifying each person’s truest self with intellect it ignores the human person’s psychosomatic complexity. Even more fatally, in identifying this intellect as a kind of participation in God it blurs the line between creature and Creator. (This is hardly surprising, for the concept of creation is different in Greek thought than in Christianity, consisting in the imposition of form upon a substrate rather than creation *ex nihilo*.) The full story

⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 17 (p. 45); cf. his *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* 3, 24–25.

⁸ Kittel 1964–1976, s.v. νοῦς (v. 4, 951–960).

⁹ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 2.19, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.6; cf. Plato, *Republic* 6.511d, *Phaedrus* 247c.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8, 10.7. ¹¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 48a; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.6–10.

of how Christian thought appropriated the classical concept of *nous* is complex and cannot be told here.¹² Suffice to say that, although the Fathers readily incorporated *nous* within their anthropology, they did so as only one pole of a complex unity. The other pole was the heart, understood in a way inspired less by Greek philosophy than by the Bible. *Nous* remains, on this view, the innate capacity to apprehend spiritual and transcendent reality, but in our fallen state this capacity has been “scattered abroad” through the senses. It needs to be restored and refocused within the heart, which (following passages such as II Corinthians 1:22 and Galatians 4:6) the Fathers viewed as the locus of divine grace. To “draw the mind into the heart” through prayer and ascetic discipline thus became a major goal of monastic practice, particularly within the Hesychast tradition.¹³

This complex legacy also explains a peculiarity of much Byzantine exegetical and liturgical writing, namely the concept of the “noetic.” The noetic is simply that which is apprehended by *nous*. But, of course, what this means changes with the concept of *nous* itself. Whereas *noetos* in classical Greek meant intelligible as opposed to sensible, in Christian writing it came to mean that which is apprehended spiritually in light of the entire teaching of the Church. Often this concept is used to make a typological or poetic identification. Thus Satan is the noetic Pharaoh, Christ is the noetic lamb, the Eucharist is the noetic pearl, the demons are noetic roaring lions, and so on.¹⁴ In such contexts “noetic” could almost be translated as “true or real,” in that it is that which is perceived by a mind properly attuned to reality. The simple term *noetos* thus became a way of encapsulating an entire worldview, one in which physical objects and historical events are the bodily presence or emblem of spiritual realities.

A final example of broad but diffuse Aristotelian influence is the concept of divine energy. This concept in its ultimate form is certainly not to be found in Aristotle, but its origins lie partly with him, and there is a clear trajectory leading from his works – particularly the theology of the Prime Mover in *Metaphysics* XII – to its final flowering in the Greek Fathers. The trajectory begins with Aristotle’s coining of the term *energeia* to indicate the active use of a faculty, as opposed to its mere possession. From this point the term came to bear in Aristotle’s mature works two distinct but related meanings, those of “activity” and “actuality.” (The former is predominant in the ethical and rhetorical works, the latter in the *Metaphysics* and *De anima*.) These meanings reconverge in *Metaphysics* XII. There we find that the Prime Mover is a being that is pure *energeia* in two distinct but related senses: (a) it has no unrealized capacities to act or be acted upon, i.e. it is pure actuality; (b) it is identical

¹² For a fuller account see Bradshaw 2009. ¹³ Hausherr 1978; Ware 2003a; 2003b; 2003c.

¹⁴ Lampe 1961, s.v. νοητός.

with its own independent and self-subsistent activity of thought (*noesis*). From these premises one may infer that the Prime Mover's activity of thought embraces all possible intelligible content, for otherwise there would be a kind of thinking in which it could engage but does not, and it would fail in that respect to be fully actual. The intelligible content of a thing is, of course, simply its form, that which makes it what it is. So the Prime Mover may fairly be said to embrace, in its single eternal act of thought, the forms of all things. However, it does more than merely think them, for Aristotle also holds that thought at the highest level of actuality is identical with its object. This means that the Prime Mover not only *thinks* the forms of all things; in some sense it *is* those forms, existing eternally and in full actuality as an integral whole. In other words, the fully actual and eternal activity which is the Prime Mover does not remain isolated from the rest of the cosmos, but is actively present in all things, constituting them as what they are. This conclusion was not drawn explicitly by Aristotle, but it was by his first great commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and it is integral to the Neoplatonic understanding of *nous* as the second hypostasis.¹⁵

Obviously not all aspects of this complex philosophical legacy were known to, or would have been endorsed by, the Church Fathers. Its importance lies rather in the semantic richness it gave to *energeia* and cognate terms, such as the verb *energein*. Unlike other word groups that are superficially similar (e.g. *drama* / *dran*, *poiesis* / *poiein*), *energeia* and its cognates always indicated a kind of activity that can, in the right circumstances, enter into and be shared by another. By this I mean not simply that two agents share the same activity, but that the activity of the one who is the source of the *energeia* vivifies and informs the recipient, while at the same time enabling the recipient to act authentically on his or her own behalf. This meaning is already prominent in the New Testament, as, for instance, when St. Paul speaks of the divine *energeia* that is being realized or made effective (*energoumenen*) in him (Colossians 1:29).¹⁶ Thanks to St. Paul it became the predominant meaning of the term in the Church Fathers, particularly in contexts dealing with divine–human interaction. It is in this meaning that the term is often translated as “energy” and came to figure prominently within Byzantine theology.

These are some examples of the myriad ways in which Aristotelian influence entered patristic thought. Such influence occurred despite the widespread ignorance or condemnation of Aristotle mentioned earlier. For the most part, ignorance of Aristotle's own works – apart from a few, such as the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, that became part of the standard

¹⁵ See further Bradshaw 2004: 1–44 (Aristotle), 68–72 (Alexander).

¹⁶ See further Bradshaw 2004: 120–123; 2006; Larchet 2010: 86–93.

educational curriculum – remained more the rule than the exception among Byzantine theologians.¹⁷ Even so, indirect influence continued through various channels, and there were also at least some cases of more direct influence. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to survey the more important cases of influence of both sorts.

Although our primary concern is the middle Byzantine period, it is important to note first a major change in the role of Aristotle within Christian theology that occurred in the later fifth and early sixth centuries. As one scholar has observed, this period gave rise to a “Byzantine scholasticism” similar in many ways to the Latin scholasticism of Boethius.¹⁸ Initially the Byzantine form of scholasticism was confined to the Christological debates, but as time went on it spread more broadly. It was marked above all by the attempt to give precise definitions of crucial terms, as well as by the use of axioms, syllogisms, enumeration, dilemmas, distinctions, stock analogies, and *reductio ad absurdum*. Most of these techniques, and some of the substance of the definitions and analogies, were derived from Aristotle’s logical works, particularly as mediated by the Neoplatonic commentators. To some extent this change reflected internal developments within the study of logic itself. Ammonios, the son of Hermeias, who lectured in Alexandria from around 480 until some time in the 520s, deliberately disengaged the study of Aristotle’s logic from that of his physics and cosmology, opening the way for students to embrace the former while rejecting the latter.¹⁹ His lectures were attended by both Christians and pagans, as we know from a vivid account left by one of his students, Zacharias of Mytilene, in his *Life of Severos*. Thereafter the works of Ammonios and his students and successors – Asklepios, Olympiodoros, John Philoponos, Elias, David, and Stephen – became important resources for theological debate.²⁰

The same period also saw a more determined effort by Christian authors to critique Aristotle’s physics and cosmology. Two late fifth-century philosophical dialogues, the *Theophrastos* of Aineias of Gaza and the *Ammonios* of Zacharias of Mytilene, aimed at defending Christian belief in divine providence, the resurrection of the dead, and the creation and perishability of the cosmos.²¹ There is also a *Refutation of Certain Doctrines*

¹⁷ For discussion of Aristotle’s place in Byzantine education see Ierodiakonou 2008.

¹⁸ Daley 1984.

¹⁹ Rashed (2007) contrasts Ammonios’ approach to logic with that of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Admittedly, Porphyry’s logical commentaries are also relatively independent of the rest of the Aristotelian system, but since Porphyry was an outspoken anti-Christian it took some time before his works could be viewed favorably by Christian authors.

²⁰ The most accessible survey of these developments remains Meyendorff 1975, although this work must be corrected in regard to Leontios of Byzantium: see Daley 1976. More focused studies include Uwe 1998; Cross 2000; 2002; Krausmüller 2011a; 2011b; Daley 2013.

²¹ These works have received relatively little attention from scholars, but see Wacht 1969; Watts 2005; Champion 2014.

of the *Aristotelians*, attributed in the manuscripts to Justin Martyr but probably by an unknown author of the late fifth century, consisting of passages from the *Physics* and *De caelo* followed by a rebuttal of each.²² The sixth century saw two further (and very different) efforts at such critique. The *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes criticized Aristotle's system of the world, with the earth at the center surrounded by concentric planetary spheres, in favor of what he took to be a more biblical cosmology.²³ John Philoponos, the famous Aristotelian exegete and mono-physite theologian, wrote a vigorous rebuttal to Indikopleustes entitled *On the Making of the World*. His Aristotelian commentaries and *Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*, however, offered his own criticisms of key elements of Aristotle's physics, including the theories of natural place and elemental motion, projectile motion, space, light, and aether, as well as, of course, the eternity of the cosmos.²⁴

The full history of the reception of Aristotelian science in Byzantium lies beyond our interest here. For our purposes it is sufficient to note the quite modest role that Aristotelian science played within theology. Anyone familiar with Aquinas' Five Ways, for example, will be aware of how Aristotelian physics enabled the development of a number of powerful arguments for the existence of God.²⁵ The Byzantines seem to have had little interest in developing these possibilities. John of Damascus in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* – the most comprehensive theological work of the middle Byzantine period – is content to repeat a traditional version of the argument from design, as well as an argument based on the correlation of mutability with createdness, both deriving from earlier patristic literature.²⁶ John's attitude toward Aristotelian cosmology is equally reserved. He observes cautiously that "some have thought" that the heaven encircles the universe and has the form of a sphere, whereas others have held that it is a hemisphere stretched out over the earth, without committing himself to either view.²⁷ He makes no mention at all of the Aristotelian view that the celestial spheres are moved by intelligences animated by the love of God, an idea that figured prominently in the western medieval religious imagination.

²² On pseudo-Justin, see Martin 1989. ²³ Anastos 1953; Wolska 1962.

²⁴ Wildberg 1988; Sorabji 2010.

²⁵ I use the term "physics" here broadly, to include, for instance, not only the principle that everything in motion is moved by another, but the principle (prominent in the Third Way) that given infinite time all possibilities are realized.

²⁶ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3; cf. Athanasios, *Against the Pagans* 35–39, Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 28 6; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.360–372, 8.66–69.

²⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 20 (II.6). Citations of John of Damascus are to chapter numbers of the Kotter edition, with those of the *PG* (used in the existing English translations) in parentheses, where these are different. For the cosmological views, see Chapter II.

Whether John's neglect of the Aristotelian worldview was due to ignorance or principled disagreement would be hard to say. We know that he read Philoponos' theological works since he quotes and discusses them at length, but there is no sign that he read the Aristotelian commentaries. Perhaps it was generally assumed that more orthodox critics such as pseudo-Justin had dealt with this aspect of Aristotle sufficiently. However that may be, Aristotle's logical works and the commentary tradition upon them remained a vital presence. The history of logic in Byzantium is treated elsewhere in this volume.²⁸ Here it will be sufficient to note the use made of Aristotelian logic in articulating some key theological doctrines. Again we will take John of Damascus as our reference point, not only because of the authoritative nature of his work, but because he wrote an entire treatise, the *Dialectica*, to present the elements of logic (and an accompanying ontology) that he considered useful for theology.

Much of the *Dialectica* consists of standard definitions, drawn largely from Porphyry and Ammonios, of a wide array of Aristotelian technical terms: the five predicables, the ten categories, nature, form, habit, privation, motion, univocal, equivocal, heteronym, paronym, and others. The most important of these for our purposes is *ousia*, a term that already in Plato and Aristotle has two sharply different meanings: (1) that which exists on its own without dependence on other things, and (2) that within each thing that defines it and gives it its distinctive character. These are standardly translated, respectively, as "substance" and "essence." John recognizes both meanings, although he explicitly defines only the former.²⁹ For each he also offers equivalents. Substance – that which exists on its own – is also known as hypostasis, and indeed this is the term that John generally prefers.³⁰ (He does not, however, present the two terms as equivalent, for reasons that will become clear in a moment.) Only a hypostasis "subsists of itself," whereas the essence, essential differences, genus, species, and accidents subsist in the hypostasis.³¹ *Ousia* in the sense of essence, John tells us, is also referred to by the Holy Fathers as nature, form (*morphe*), and species (*eidōs*).³² Nature, in turn, is "that unchangeable and immutable principle, cause, and power implanted by the Creator in each species for its activity," a definition that echoes *Physics* II.1 (although Aristotle makes no reference to a creator).³³ It is clear from this definition

²⁸ See Chapter 21. ²⁹ See John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 4 (substance) and 5 (essence).

³⁰ *Ibid.* 30 (29) and 43–44 (42–43). Hypostasis, in turn, is equivalent to individual (*atomon*) and person (*prosoopon*). Despite its traditional meaning, the latter term in this context is not restricted to rational beings, but can include, for example, an individual horse (44 [43]).

³¹ *Ibid.* 43 (42); cf. the definition of "enhyposstaton" as that which "does not subsist in itself but is considered in hypostases," as are species and nature (45 [44], p. 110). For the development of this meaning of "enhyposstaton" see Uwe 1998.

³² John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 5; cf. 31 (30). ³³ *Ibid.* 31 (30), pp. 93–94.

that the essence is not simply a defining set of properties, as is often the case in modern usage, but an inner active principle, that which makes each thing to be what it is *qua* member of a species. In each hypostasis of a species, the nature subsists “complete and in the same way.”³⁴ John is thus a realist about universals, but a moderate realist in that he thinks of universals as subsisting only in particulars.³⁵

A helpful analogy for the relationship between universals and particulars on this view is that of a single computer program and its many instantiations.³⁶ Just as a program has no effective existence until it is actually installed in a computer, so a nature is without subsistence (*anhypostatos*) apart from the hypostases in which it is present. The analogy also helpfully underscores the nature’s causal role, for just as a program imparts causal powers to the computer in which it is present, so natures are the causal principles enabling hypostases to act as they do. Of course, in a broader sense a program can be said to “exist” (*einai*) in the mind of its creator even prior to its actual installation in a computer. In the same way, although natures subsist only in particulars, they exist in the mind of God prior to creation. In his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, John explains that God is “like an infinite and boundless sea of essence (*ousia*)” who “beheld all things before they came to be, conceiving each timelessly in accordance with His voluntary and timeless conception.”³⁷ In this sense, God may be said to transcend *ousia*, a point that John, following Dionysios the Areopagite, encapsulates by referring to God as *hyperousios*.³⁸

In his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, John puts this largely Aristotelian ontology to work to address a wide range of theological issues. The two most important are, not surprisingly, the Trinity and the Incarnation. As regards the former, John follows the traditional Greek patristic understanding of the *homoousion* as meaning that the Son and the Holy Spirit are (a) generated from the *ousia* of the Father, and, in consequence, (b) of the same *ousia* with the Father. Indeed, (c) the Three are jointly a single *ousia* made known in three hypostases.³⁹ Both meanings of *ousia* are in play here: in (a) and (b) it means essence, whereas in (c) it seems to mean substance. (This is the reason why *ousia* in the sense of substance and “hypostasis” are not simply synonyms, for a single substance can exist in three hypostases.) Yet the two meanings are not wholly separate, for the one *ousia* made

³⁴ *Ibid.* 31 (30), p. 94.

³⁵ More precisely, moderate realism is sometimes opposed to “exaggerated realism,” which also holds that universals subsist only in particulars, but that they do so in the same way as the particulars themselves (Copleston 1962: 136–155). It seems clear that in this sense, too, John is a moderate realist.

³⁶ I borrow this analogy from Jacobs 2012: 91.

³⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 9 (pp. 31–32).

³⁸ *Ibid.* 8 (p. 18), and frequently elsewhere.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 8 (pp. 19 a single *ousia*, 20 Son, 24 Holy Spirit).

known in three hypostases is also a single essence, that which the Father imparts to the other two hypostases. One is reminded of the Aristotelian thesis that things without matter are identical with their own essence.⁴⁰ Of course, John would not want to say that each of the divine Persons is simply identical with the divine *ousia*, in the sense of either substance or essence, for each is distinguished from the *ousia* (and from the others) by its hypostatic characteristics.

John also employs the concept of *ousia* and its associated technical vocabulary within Christology. Against the Monophysites, he argues that a compound nature cannot be *homoousion* with either of its constituents; the body, for example, is composed of the four elements but is not of the same essence with any of them. Thus if Christ had a compound nature, as held by the Monophysites, he was (contrary to the Nicene Creed) not *homoousion* with the Father or with humanity.⁴¹ Because a nature is present as an undivided whole within each of its hypostases, both human and divine nature are wholly present in Christ. John states this conclusion forcefully to underscore that it is precisely for this reason that salvation is possible: “We hold that the entire essence of divinity has been united to the whole of human nature . . . As a whole He took up the whole of me, and the whole is united to the whole, so that He might by grace bestow salvation upon the whole, for ‘what is not assumed is not healed’.”⁴²

This emphatic and somewhat poetic statement could easily lead to misunderstanding, for it might seem to suggest that human nature *qua* universal was united to God, rather than human nature as present in a particular man, Jesus Christ. Perhaps for this reason John returns to the same subject a few chapters later. Nature, he says, can be regarded in three ways: either in thought alone, in which sense it has no subsistence; as present in all the hypostases of a species, in which sense it is known as specific nature; and as present in a single hypostasis in conjunction with accidents, in which sense it is known as individual nature.⁴³ The Son took on human nature, not in the first sense (which would not be Incarnation at all), nor in the second (for He did not take on all human hypostases), but only in the third. In other words, the proposition that “the entire essence of divinity has been united to the whole of human nature” must be understood qualitatively rather than extensionally, as indicating only that both the divine and human natures present in Christ are complete and lacking

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.6, 7.11 (1037a33–b7).

⁴¹ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 47 (III.3). John is aware, of course, that the Monophysites viewed nature as equivalent to hypostasis, and addresses this usage (which he sees as a confusion) later in the chapter.

⁴² *Ibid.* 50 (p. 121) (III.6), quoting Gregory of Nazianzos, *Letter* 101.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 55 (III.11). The accidents John has in mind here are the “inseparable accidents” by which one hypostasis differs from another, such as being snub-nosed, gray-eyed, and the like (*Dialectica* 13).

in nothing. This is traditional Cyrillian and Chalcedonian doctrine, expressed now with a quasi-Aristotelian technical precision.

The use of terminology and concepts drawn from Aristotelian logic is the clearest case of relatively direct Aristotelian influence in John's theology. There are several other areas where such influence is evident, but in a more mediated form. One of these is the concept of operation or energy (*energeia*) that John deploys in rebutting Monoenergism, the view that Christ possessed only a single divine-human energy. John offers several definitions of this term, none of them directly from Aristotle but all with a recognizably Aristotelian ancestry. The most important from a polemical standpoint is the following: "energy is the natural power and movement innate to every essence."⁴⁴ From this definition it follows that, since Christ is of two natures (or essences), he has two corresponding natural energies. The definition itself is one that John draws from Maximos the Confessor, who in turn found it in Gregory of Nyssa, but it fairly summarizes at least one strand in Aristotle's complex thought about *energeia*.⁴⁵

John also draws upon Aristotelian concepts in responding to Monotheletism, the view that Christ possessed only a single divine-human will. The term *thelesis* (will) itself is not in Aristotle, and the definition of *thelesis* as the natural faculty of will by Maximos marked an important advance upon Aristotle and upon classical thought generally.⁴⁶ Despite its novelty, in articulating this concept Maximos did draw crucially upon several elements that are prominent in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as wish (*boulesis*), deliberation (*bouleusis*), and choice (*prohairesis*).⁴⁷ Although Aristotle does not emphasize the sequential character of these acts, Maximos arranges them sequentially as steps in the act of willing (*thelon*).⁴⁸ He also inserts several further steps, among them *zetesis* (inquiry), which Aristotle had identified as the genus of deliberation but Maximos regards as a step leading from wish to deliberation. John adopts this sequence and the accompanying account of *thelesis* almost wholesale, with only a few minor adjustments.⁴⁹ It was in the form he gave it that the theory of will developed by Maximos went on to achieve extensive influence in both the Christian east and west.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 37 (p. 93) (II.23); cf. other definitions in 36 (II.22) and 59 (III.15).

⁴⁵ See Maximos, *Opuscula* 27 (col. 281A) and the fragment of Gregory edited in Diekamp 1938: 13–15. For Aristotle see particularly *Metaphysics* 9.3 (1047a30–32) and *De anima* 2.4 (415a14–20), with discussion in Bradshaw 2004: 7, 57–58, 63–64, 136.

⁴⁶ Bradshaw 2013.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.2–3; cf. Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 33–34, for the account of these terms (deriving from Aristotle) probably read by Maximos.

⁴⁸ Maximos, *Opuscula* 1 (col. 21D–24A), 28 (= *Disputation with Pyrrhus*) (col. 293B–C).

⁴⁹ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 36 (II.22), 58 (III.15); see Gauthier 1954; Frede 2002.

John's *Dialectica* and *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* are the most extensive case of Aristotelian influence in theology during the middle Byzantine period. Thereafter the instances of influence, although significant, become more sporadic. Among them are a couple of notable examples during the Iconoclast controversy. Interestingly, John of Damascus' own work in defense of icons has little that could be called distinctively Aristotelian. It seems to have been an argument advanced after John wrote by the Iconoclast emperor Constantine V (741–775) that prompted the iconophiles to move in this direction. Constantine argued that an image must be of the same essence (*homoousios*) with its prototype, and that accordingly the only true image of Christ is the Eucharist.⁵⁰ Now it happens that at the beginning of the *Categories* Aristotle mentions the case of a man and his image precisely as an example of things that share the same name but differ in essence. He labels such things "homonyms." Although Aristotle speaks here of "something written" (*to gegrammenon*) rather than an image or icon (*eikon*), plainly the same point could be made about an icon. In fact, some Byzantine logical handbooks had already paraphrased Aristotle's example in this way prior to the outbreak of Iconoclasm.⁵¹ Thus the *Categories* offered a potential resource against the claim that an image must be of the same essence as its prototype.

During the period of "Second Iconoclasm" (815–843), the two leading iconophile authors, Theodore the Stoudite and Nikephoros of Constantinople, drew upon the concept of homonymy to explicate the relationship of icons to their prototypes. They also incorporated icon and prototype under the Aristotelian category of relative (*pros ti*), although they drew from this point rather different conclusions. Theodore observes that the icon and its prototype are called by the same name homonymously: an icon of Christ "is Christ by identity of name (*kata to homonumon*), but an image of Christ by relation (*kata to pros ti*)."⁵² Because they are relatives, the icon and its prototype exist simultaneously, at least in the sense that the icon is always potentially present in the prototype; hence, Theodore argues, to reject veneration of the icon is implicitly to reject that of the prototype.⁵³ Nikephoros, too, states that the resemblance of icon to prototype "confers homonymy" upon them.⁵⁴ For him, however, the fact that they are relatives means that, even if the prototype is removed, the relationship between them remains, a point that underscores the enduring value of the icon.⁵⁵ As it happens, both authors could claim support in Aristotle, for

⁵⁰ The latter point was repeated by the Iconoclast Council of 754: see Gero 1975.

⁵¹ Roueché 1974: 72; 1980: 94. The Aristotelian commentators also occasionally substitute *eikon* for *gegrammenon*, e.g. Simplicios, *On the Categories* 31.

⁵² Theodore the Stoudite, *Three Refutations of the Iconoclasts* 1.11 (col. 341C); cf. 1.8.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 3.D.2–5. ⁵⁴ Nikephoros of Constantinople, *Three Refutations* 1.30 (col. 280B).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 1.30 (280A).

Aristotle holds that while correlatives normally come into being and pass away simultaneously, there are cases where one retains its character as a relative even in the absence of the other.⁵⁶

Another prominent theologian of the Iconoclast period in whom one can find traces of Aristotelian influence was Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750–c. 825), bishop of Haran in what is today southern Turkey. Although Theodore lived under Abbasid rule and wrote in Arabic, many of his works were translated into Greek and circulated in Byzantium, so he belongs at least tangentially to the history of Byzantine theology. Theodore draws extensively from John of Damascus but also offers some new ideas of his own. Among the latter is an interesting application of the distinction between potentiality and actuality: any property present actually in a hypostasis must be present potentially in the corresponding nature, so that if Socrates is hook-nosed, for example, hook-nosedness must be present potentially in human nature. Yet, crucially, when a hypostasis partakes of two natures its properties are present potentially only in the nature that exemplifies those properties, so that Christ's mutability and suffering need not imply that these properties are present even potentially in the divine nature.⁵⁷ Theodore also makes frequent use of the Aristotelian stricture against an infinite causal regress, arguing, for example, that the earth must be upheld by God since any physical substance supposed to uphold it would require to be upheld in its turn.⁵⁸

The most notable theologian immediately after the Iconoclast controversy was Photios, patriarch of Constantinople 858–867 and 877–886. His *Amphilochia* is an unsystematic but learned and wide-ranging exploration of various theological topics. It is of significance for the history of philosophy as well as that of theology, for it includes a synopsis of Aristotle's *Categories* that is not a mere pastiche of earlier works, but a well-integrated treatise revealing substantive original thought.⁵⁹ The discussion of *ousia* is particularly interesting. Photios first notes the various meanings of the term: form, matter, the composite of the two, the subsistence (*hyparxis*) of each being, and (outside of philosophy) property or possessions, as well as the divine *hyperousios ousia*. He then adds that there is yet another meaning of the term, and that the category of *ousia* properly consists only of this: things that are self-subsistent (*authyparkton*) in the sense that they need nothing else to complete their subsistence. *Ousia* in this sense includes

⁵⁶ See Aristotle, *Categories* 7 (7b15–8a12); Aristotle's examples are knowledge and the object of knowledge, and perception and the object of perception. For further discussion of the use of Aristotle in the iconoclast controversy, see Alexander 1958: 189–213; Parry 2013.

⁵⁷ Lamoreaux 2005: 104–05. ⁵⁸ Lamoreaux 2005: 158–159, 229–30.

⁵⁹ Photios, *Amphilochia* Q. 137–147, discussed in Anton 1994; Ierodiakonou 2005a. Louth (2006) provides an overview of Photios' theological work.

angels, souls, and intellect (*nous*).⁶⁰ Photios is clearly aware that he is rejecting at this point the explicit doctrine of the *Categories*, where *ousia* in the primary sense is identified with the individual material object. Yet in a broader sense he remains well within the Aristotelian camp, for in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle defines primary substance precisely as that which needs nothing else to complete its existence, and he remains open to the possibility that something other than individual objects may best fit this description.⁶¹

Photios also draws on Aristotle in other interesting and innovative ways. One of them pertains to divine omnipresence. Photios maintains that God is present in all things not only through His activity (*kat' energeian*) but also substantially (*kat' ousian*). His argument clearly draws inspiration from the theology of *Metaphysics* XII: according to Photios, God is perfectly perceptive intellect (*dioratikos nous*) that is always in act, and as such He is present in all things in virtue of actively cognizing them; since He is perfectly in act, however, there is no difference in Him between self-existence and self-activity, so that whatever He is by virtue of His activity (*kat' energeian*) He is also substantially (*kat' ousian*).⁶² Photios here comes close to affirming the identity in God of essence and activity, a view that would be sharply at odds with the prior patristic tradition.⁶³ He does not quite do so, however, focusing instead on what God is in accordance with (*kata*) each. Elsewhere it seems clear that even from a philosophical standpoint – to say nothing of biblical exegesis – he does not wish to endorse a thoroughly Aristotelian theology. For instance, he rejects the Platonic theory of Ideas on the grounds that it would restrict God's ability to create what He wishes (*to boulomenon*), an objection that could be made with equal force against an Aristotelian theology.⁶⁴

Another strikingly innovative use that Photios makes of Aristotelian ideas is in his reply to the question, “why does the divine go forth to three [i.e. the Trinity]?”⁶⁵ He observes that, as a rule, “whatever things worthy of God we perceive in the divine we find that nature has gathered together as three.”⁶⁶ The primary example he offers is that of essence (*ousia*), power (*dunamis*), and energy (*energeia*). Although not explicitly found in Aristotle, this triad had long been used by his commentators as a way of summarizing his view of the relationship among these three terms.⁶⁷ Photios observes that, although all three are found in God, they cannot

⁶⁰ Photios, *Amphilochia* Q. 138 (v. 5, 145–146).

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.11 (1037b1–4); cf. 7.4 (1030a10–11).

⁶² Photios, *Amphilochia* Q. 75 (v. 5, 87). ⁶³ Bradshaw 2004; Larchet 2010.

⁶⁴ Photios, *Amphilochia* Q. 77 (v. 5, 95). ⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Q. 181 (v. 5, 234). ⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Q. 181 (v. 5, 235).

⁶⁷ See particularly the discussion of the essence, powers, and activities of the soul in Aristotle, *De anima* 2.1–4, and the later development of the triad by Iamblichos (Bradshaw 2004: 136) and Proklos, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 169.

be joined into a single reality (*hypostasis*) or given a single account. (This is further evidence, incidentally, that he does not identify the divine essence and activity.) At the same time, he recognizes that all three are attributed equally to the entire Trinity, so that there is not a one-to-one correlation between them and the divine Persons.⁶⁸ In effect, he here arrives independently at a view much like the traditional western conception of the *vestigia Trinitatis*, the view that creation is permeated by traces of the Trinity.

The century and a half after Photios saw few theological works of much philosophical sophistication, and so, naturally, little evidence of Aristotelian influence. The greatest theologian of this period, Symeon the New Theologian (c. 949–1022), says little that might be considered distinctively Aristotelian. It is true that Aristotelian logic remained important in the educational curriculum, eliciting works such as the scholia on the *Eisagoge* and *Categories* by Arethas of Caesarea (c. 850–c. 932/44) and the portions devoted to logic of the *Anonymous Heiberg* (1007).⁶⁹ But Arethas' theological works are not markedly Aristotelian. Rather more can be found in the work of Symeon's disciple, Niketas Stethatos (c. 1005–c. 1090). Niketas is a prime example of the tendency mentioned earlier to incorporate the philosophical concept of intellect (*nous*) within a biblical anthropology. For Niketas, God is the First Intellect and has given humanity *nous* as His image.⁷⁰ Just as God is never without His Logos and Spirit, and the three together are one God, so humans too possess *logos* and spirit (i.e. the rational soul), a threefold identity that manifests the divine image.⁷¹ A particularly Aristotelian note is struck in the statement that God as *nous* is “the cause of the eternal motion of the All.”⁷² On the whole, however, it seems likely that Niketas is working from earlier patristic texts, where the identity of the divine Nous, Logos, and Spirit with the Trinity had already been developed, rather than directly from Aristotle.

A new phase in the Byzantine reception of Aristotle began with the work of Niketas' younger contemporary, Michael Psellos (1018–c. 1075). Psellos and those who wrote in his wake – John Italos, Eustratios of Nicaea, Isaac Sebastokrator, and others – are treated elsewhere in this volume.⁷³ It suffices for our purposes to note that, although these authors generally accorded a certain priority to Plato and Proklos, this by no means excluded attention to Aristotle. Psellos, for example, draws from Aristotle for his discussion of the virtues and offers respectful summaries of Aristotle's

⁶⁸ Photios, *Amphilochia* Q. 181 (v. 5, 236). ⁶⁹ Ierodiakonou 2005a.

⁷⁰ Niketas Stethatos, *Against the Jews* 9 (p. 422).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; cf. Niketas Stethatos, *On the Soul* 21–22; *On Spiritual Knowledge* 5–8.

⁷² *On Spiritual Knowledge* 28 (col. 966c). ⁷³ See Chapters 26 and 27.

views on issues such as the relationship of the soul to the body, the composition of the heavens, and the eternity of the cosmos.⁷⁴ It seems safe to say that the philosophical revival inaugurated by Psellos led to an increase in the direct reading of Aristotle's works beyond the logical corpus, opening a further channel through which Aristotle remained present to the Byzantine world.

Having tallied these various cases of influence, one cannot help but be struck by the ways in which Aristotle was *not* influential. Just as Aristotle's cosmology exercised little sway over the Byzantine religious imagination, and his science was (if not openly rejected) kept somewhat at arm's length, so his theology exercised relatively little direct influence. One does not find among the Byzantines, as among other religious cultures of the Middle Ages, elaborate adaptations of the physico-theological arguments of *Physics* VII–VIII, nor of such key Aristotelian ideas as that God is pure act or the identity in the divine mind of intellect, act, and object of thought.⁷⁵ Likewise the conception of theology as a science fitting the strictures laid out in the *Posterior Analytics*, so prominent among the Latin scholastics, seems scarcely to have crossed the minds of the Byzantines. The examples of Aristotelian influence surveyed here are instructive, not only in their own right, but for what they show about the limitations of Byzantine Aristotelianism as compared to the far more imposing Aristotelianisms developed elsewhere. In this light it seems right to speak of the *presence* of Aristotle, for Aristotle remained present, to be sure, but only as one among many resources for Christian thought.

⁷⁴ Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina* 33–34, 44–46, 75–80, 120–121, 126, 131, 156–157.

⁷⁵ There is a partial exception in that the last-named thesis can be found in more Neoplatonizing authors such as Psellos.

CHAPTER 23

READING AND COMMENTING ON ARISTOTLE

MICHELE TRIZIO

In the prologue to his paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima*, the thirteenth-century monk and scholar Sophonias famously draws a clear-cut distinction between commentaries proper and paraphrases.¹ Paraphrases differ from commentaries in that (1) the latter are longer; (2) whereas commentaries discuss each lemma of Aristotle in sections, paraphrases rephrase the text in a continuous manner; (3) they involve different authorial practices: whereas commentators distance themselves from the text, paraphrasts impersonate Aristotle himself; and (4) though both aim to elucidate Aristotle's text, the former do so by interpreting it, while the latter dismantle and then reassemble Aristotle's words. Sophonias furthers this distinction by referring to Themistios, the most famous late antique paraphrast of Aristotle, and by promising to follow in the footsteps of Michael Psellos.²

Sophonias' distinction rests on Simplikios' prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.³ According to Simplikios, (1) the ideal commentator must show a vast and deep knowledge of Aristotle's work; (2) he must be impartial, neither presenting certain statements of Aristotle as unsatisfactory, nor defending them as though he were one of Aristotle's disciples; and (3) with respect to Plato and Aristotle's allegedly different views, he must go beyond the letter (*lexis*) toward the real meaning (*nous*) of these philosophers' views in order to uncover their harmony.⁴

Aristotle was read continually in Byzantium and received the attention of erudite scholars who more or less matched Simplikios' first requirement. However, with respect to impartiality, when facing difficult passages and regarding the differences between Plato and Aristotle, the agenda of many Byzantine Aristotelian scholars was at odds with that of Simplikios. In spite of the relative intellectual autonomy of the commentators' agenda, it is undeniable that the Byzantines read and interpreted Aristotle through the

¹ Sophonias, *In De anima* 1.4–3.9; see Searby 2011: 1208–1211.

² Bydén 2006; Golitsis 2007: 640–642; Ierodiakonou 2012: 202–205.

³ Simplikios, *In Cat.* 1.3–3.17; *In De caelo* 176.32–34; see Hadot 2004.

⁴ Simplikios, *In Cat.* 7.23–32; see Baltussen 2008: 198–210. Harmony between Plato and Aristotle: Sorabji 2005: v. 3, 37–40.

prism of late antique interpreters: the Church Fathers on the one hand and the late antique commentators on the other.⁵

TEACHING ARISTOTLE IN THE SCHOOLS

Late antique commentators regarded Aristotle, in particular his logic, natural philosophy, and ethics, as the basis for approaching Plato and ascending to the investigation of more sublime realities.⁶ By the end of the sixth century, Christian commentators after Philoponos restricted this curriculum to Aristotle's logic alone.⁷ This was probably because the intellectual ascent postulated in the Neoplatonic curriculum did not match the agenda of Christian scholars. The tremendous success of Aristotle's logic and, to a lesser extent, his natural philosophy in Byzantium between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries reflects precisely Aristotle's propaedeutic function within the curriculum of the sixth and seventh centuries. It also reflects the belief among Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists, and Church Fathers that his philosophy (especially the *Categories*) provided a good explanatory model for the sensible world but not for the intelligible and supernatural.⁸ Eventually, Christian authors extended the instrumental function granted to the logic by the commentators to a wider range of tasks, such as the refutation of heresies.⁹ Several works composed during the Iconoclast controversy also used Aristotle's logical vocabulary, which, again, makes it clear that Aristotle's logic is a key point of interest in his corpus in Byzantium.¹⁰ Tellingly, Psellos considered Aristotle to be nothing more than a good logician and physiologist.¹¹ Literary and manuscript evidence also supports the idea that the Byzantines read Aristotle through the prism of the late antique commentators. In fact, the layout of the most important thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts of the *corpus aristotelicum* displays the text in the middle, framed in the margins by the corresponding late antique commentaries or scholia.

Manuscript evidence also suggests that passages or problems arising from the reading of Aristotle were interpreted and discussed by Byzantine scholars in private circles, possibly under the supervision of a leading figure. For example, at the end of his paraphrase of

⁵ In general: Oehler 1964; Harlfinger 1971; Mondrain 2000b; Moraux 1970 for the textual tradition.

⁶ Sorabji 2005: v. 3, 41–42.

⁷ Westerink 1990; Hadot 1990; Hoffmann 2006; Golitsis 2008a: 7–16.

⁸ Sorabji 2005: v. 3, 56–61.

⁹ Runia 1989; Elders 1990; 1994; Frede 2005; Karamanolis 2013: 117–143.

¹⁰ Parry 1996: 52–63; 2013; Anagnostopoulos 2013.

¹¹ Psellos, *Theologica II*, 6, p. 53.16–17; see Bydén 2013: 169–171.

De interpretatione, Psellos (d. in the 1070s) refers to the *theatron* around him, that is a circle of disciples, collaborators, and listeners whom he was addressing.¹² Eustratios of Nicaea (d. after 1120) claimed to have composed his commentary on *Posterior Analytics* 2 at the request of his fellows (*betairoi*).¹³ Similar references are present in Michael of Ephesos' commentary on *Parva naturalia*.¹⁴ George Pachymeres (d. c. 1310) and later John Chortasmenos (d. c. 1436) discussed, commented, and compiled material from Aristotle and the commentators together with their pupils and collaborators, both for contingent teaching purposes and for transmitting this material in a more understandable way to future generations of Byzantine scholars.¹⁵ Oral and written culture were complementary here: the production of commentaries on Aristotle for scholarly purposes both reflected and impacted the teaching of Aristotle at schools.¹⁶ This is particularly evident in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts witnessing the collaboration of students and masters in copying, excerpting, or summarizing earlier texts.¹⁷ Aristotelian scholarship also benefited from patronage. The most relevant case is probably that of princess Anna Komnene (d. c. 1153), who, according to her biographer, sponsored scholars working on works by Aristotle which had not yet been commented on or which had received less attention in late antiquity.¹⁸

Byzantine scholarship on Aristotle's logic and physics emerged largely from didactic contexts.¹⁹ An interesting case-study from the Costantinopolitan schools is a class report on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* written by a student of John Italos (d. after 1082).²⁰ Soon after, Theodore of Smyrna wrote an *Epitome of Natural Philosophy* which summarizes, for the benefit of a young and unacquainted audience, ancient views of physics via the late antique tradition of commentary. This is likely the reason behind his remarks about testing all ancient standpoints against Christian doctrine.²¹ Such statements were quite common in texts addressed to students and reflect the utilitarian and instrumental approach to philosophy and the classics endorsed even by more open-minded scholars such as John Mauropous and Psellos.²² Around 1165–1167 (or slightly after 1151, as has recently been suggested) the Consul of Philosophers Michael of Anchialos also promised to teach logic and physics

¹² Psellos, *On the De interpretatione* 10.26 (unedited: see Laur. Plut. fol. 175v).

¹³ Eustratios, *On Posterior Analytics II* 123.27–29. ¹⁴ Ricklin 1998: 303–305. ¹⁵ Golitsis 2010.

¹⁶ E.g. ms. Barocci 131 contains material from the notes prepared by Psellos for his classes and the *De omnifaria doctrina*, written for the emperor Michael VII (1071–1078); see Pérez-Martín 2013a.

¹⁷ In general: Cavallo 2003; Orsini 2005; Plato and Aristotle: Menchelli 2010. On the social aspects, see Magdalino 1993a: 335–356; Gaul 2011.

¹⁸ Tornikes, *Funeral Oration for Anna Komnene* 283.4–12; see Browning 1962.

¹⁹ Constantinides 1982; commentaries on the logic: Benakis 1988; early logical school texts: Roueché 1974.

²⁰ Italos, *Quaestiones* 44; see Rigo 2001. ²¹ Trizio 2012a. ²² Cavallo 2001.

(in particular, meteorology).²³ When placed in context, Michael's statement may appear more traditional than the modern editor indicates.²⁴ Nikephoros Blemmydes (d. c. 1271/73) composed two *Epitomai* of logic and physics respectively in light of their usefulness for defending theological truth where they (in particular the physics) did not contradict Revelation.²⁵ According to George of Cyprus (1241–1289), George Akropolites (d. 1282), his master and a pupil of Blemmydes, conceived of logic and physics as preliminary disciplines in his teaching activity.²⁶ George Pachymeres (d. c. 1310) also viewed these two disciplines as important components of the curriculum.²⁷ In the same vein, Theodore Metochites (d. 1332) invited his pupil Nikephoros Gregoras (d. c. 1360) to study Aristotle's logic and physics, as if the two disciplines went together as one and the same pedagogic project.²⁸

However, the vast quantity of extant Aristotle manuscripts and the many commentaries should not lead us to overstate the Byzantine appraisal of Aristotle. The Byzantines did not give the Philosopher unconditional approval. On the contrary, on many points they criticized his views as untenable both from the standpoint of pure philosophical inquiry and/or from that of their compatibility with Christian doctrine.²⁹ For these reasons, even though many Byzantine approaches to Aristotle reveal the heritage of ancient trends, Simplicios would not have fully accepted most Byzantine commentators.

PHILOSOPHICAL POINTS OF CRITICISM

Byzantine scholars also inherited a critical approach toward some Aristotelian positions from late antiquity, in particular from the Middle Platonist Atticus, from Late Neoplatonists such as Proklos, and from the Church Fathers.³⁰ The first of these is the traditional prejudice against Aristotle's definition of the soul as "the first entelechy of a natural body potentially having life," as denying the immortality of the soul.³¹ Echoes of this criticism mostly survive in ecclesiastical documents, such as the condemnations of John Italos, as a residue of the earlier patristic tradition.³² In fact, on this point Byzantine scholars accepted the more nuanced understanding of Aristotle's theory of the soul elaborated by late antique

²³ Michael of Anchialos, *Inaugural Lecture* 180.104–108; dating: Polemis 2011.

²⁴ Browning 1961: 182–183.

²⁵ Blemmydes, *Epitome logica* in *PG* 142:688c.

²⁶ George of Cyprus, *Encomium for Michael Palaiologos* in *PG* 142:380D; see Golitsis 2008b: 61–62.

²⁷ Golitsis 2008b: 54–60. ²⁸ Metochites, *Carmina* IV; also *Semeioseis gnomikai* 11.

²⁹ Bydén 2013. ³⁰ Bydén 2013: 154–168. Atticus: Karamanolis 2006: 150–190.

³¹ Aristotle, *De anima* 2.412a26–28; for criticism, see Bydén 2013: 163 n. 67.

³² *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 57.194–195, combined with the traditional prejudice against Plato's view of the soul and metempsychosis.

commentators such as Philoponos and pseudo-Simplikios. According to them, since Aristotle also mentions the intellect as something separate and immortal in *De anima* 3.5 (430a17–25), one must conclude that some part of the soul, the noblest of all, actually survives the body.³³ Among Byzantines supporting this approach to Aristotle’s psychology, one of the most elegant is George Tornikes, who refers indirectly to Philoponos’ and pseudo-Simplikios’ notion of “double entelechy” as a safe way of accepting the otherwise problematic Aristotelian view on the soul.³⁴

The problem of Aristotle’s Prime Mover (*Physics* 8 and *Metaphysics* 12) had little impact on Byzantine scholars. Above all the Neoplatonists had considered Aristotle’s explanation of the nature and function of the Prime Mover insufficient, since it could account only for the existence of movement, not the existence of things.³⁵ But it was not until much later, with George “Gemistos” Plethon (d. 1452), that the whole issue would be revived.³⁶ Interestingly, it seems that before Plethon some Byzantine scholars, in particular the above-mentioned George Pachymeres, regarded Aristotle’s Prime Mover as compatible with the Christian God.³⁷ For the same reason Scholarios (the first patriarch after the Fall) praised Aristotle as a monotheist.³⁸

In late antiquity, Aristotle had also been charged with denying the First Cause’s divine providence in the sublunar world. It would, however, seem that this discussion left little trace in Byzantium.³⁹ But the denial of a temporal beginning of the world was an important late antique and Byzantine allegation against Aristotle which not even scholars favorable to him could ignore.⁴⁰ Aristotle was not the only classical philosopher associated with it. Often this charge hit the whole ancient philosophical tradition.⁴¹ Pseudo-Justin Martyr (fifth or sixth century) was probably the first extant Christian author to attack Aristotle on this point.⁴² Scholars of the Gaza school, such as Aineias and Zacharias of Mytilene,

³³ E.g. Philoponos, *In De anima* 10.5–12.2; pseudo-Simplikios, *In De anima* 102.30–103.8; also in Psellos, *Philosophica minora* II 13, p. 31.1–3; Italos, *Quaestiones* 50, p. 65.84–88; Michael of Ephesos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* 10, 576.32; Sophonias, *In De anima* 111.3–11; witnesses in Bydén 2013: 164 n. 74.

³⁴ Tornikes, *Funeral Oration for Anna Komnene* 289.13–19. The probable sources are pseudo-Simplikios, *In De anima* 4.30–5.5, and Philoponos, *In De anima* 193.27–194.8. See also Simplikios, *In De caelo* 380.16–18; traces of this notion in Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 2, 13, p. 44.22–25 (excerpt from Philoponos); see Blumenthal 1996: 94–98.

³⁵ Syrianos, *In metaph.* 117.25–118.11; Proklos, *On the Timaeus*, v. 1, 266.28–268.24.

³⁶ Pletho, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato* 321.23–322.19; see Bydén 2013: 164–165.

³⁷ Golitsis 2012. ³⁸ Gennadios Scholarios, *In Praise of Aristotle* 507.2–3.

³⁹ Bydén 2013: 159–162. ⁴⁰ E.g. Pachymeres, *Philosophia* 10, 73.3 ff.

⁴¹ E.g. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.3.21–37, 1.7.18–26; see Bydén 2013: 158–159. On the late antique debate, see Sorabji 2005: v. 2, 162–188.

⁴² Pseudo-Justin Martyr, *Confutatio* 129C–130C, 138B–E, 146A–C, 146E–147D, 197E–199A; see Runia 1989: 22, with the caveat by Bydén 2013: 158 n. 46. Even after pseudo-Justin, the eternity or co-eternity of matter is sometimes associated with ancient philosophy in general and not Aristotle specifically. See

mentioned Aristotle (whom they read mostly through the prism of the commentary tradition) in connection with the denial of the universe's temporal beginning,⁴³ while Philoponos famously composed pamphlets in opposition to Aristotle on the eternity of the world.⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, Psellos associated Aristotle with uncreated matter,⁴⁵ while this very view as attributed to Aristotle is discussed by Blemmydes in the context of those issues concerning which ancient physics does not match Revelation.⁴⁶ At times, we catch echoes of Plato's and Aristotle's differences on this topic, as in the eleventh-century *Conspectus rerum naturalium* composed by Symeon Seth. Here Aristotle's view of the universe as ungenerated and unperishable is compared to the generated but unperishable universe of Plato's *Timaeus*.⁴⁷

For obvious reasons, criticism of Aristotle's fifth element pertained almost exclusively to him. Introduced in his *De caelo* I (268b11–269b17) as an explanation of the non-rectilinear movement of celestial bodies, this notion was attacked, for different reasons, by both Neoplatonists and the Church Fathers.⁴⁸ A number of Byzantine thinkers also rejected the fifth element as incompatible with Christian dogma.⁴⁹ Symeon Seth mentions it in connection with Philoponos' argument against it.⁵⁰ Philoponos is also the source for Metochites' critique of this Aristotelian view as an absurdity.⁵¹ Psellos too preferred Philoponos' critique to Simplikios' concordist approach, according to which Aristotle's fifth element is compatible with Plato's *Timaeus* (55a), where the dodecahedron is described as the fifth shape assigned to the universe as a whole.⁵² However, Psellos ends up supporting his theological hero Gregory of Nazianzos and the latter's critique of the fifth element.⁵³ While Psellos avoided Simplikios' reconciliation, his pupil Italos excerpted from his concordist approach (from the commentary on *De caelo*), without inquiring on the compatibility of this doctrine with Revelation.⁵⁴ The late antique debate regarding the fifth element would be revived in Plethon's arguments in favor of the four

e.g. Italos, *Quaestiones* 92, p. 144.1–4. Italos' teacher, Psellos, warned his students not to accept Hellenic views (no reference to Aristotle here) on uncreated matter: *Philosophica minora* I 3, p. 11.211–213.

⁴³ Aineias of Gaza, *Theophrastos* 46.23–47.2; Zacharias of Mytilene, *Ammonios*, lines 92–179; see Sorabji 2012: vii–xxx; Champion 2014.

⁴⁴ Wildberg 1987. ⁴⁵ Psellos, *Theologica* I 50, p. 196.124–125.

⁴⁶ Blemmydes, *Epitome physica* in *PG* 142:1224B–1228C.

⁴⁷ Symeon Seth, *Conspectus rerum naturalium* 3.30.1–3; also Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina* 157. For Symeon Seth, see Chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Sorabji 2005: v.2, 357–370.

⁴⁹ Theodore of Smyrna, *Epitome of Physics* 4.21–5.3; Glykas, *Annales* 11.9–20; Blemmydes, *Epitome physica* in *PG* 142:1216B.

⁵⁰ Seth, *Conspectus rerum naturalium* 3.36. ⁵¹ Bydén 2003: 178–199.

⁵² Simplikios, *In De caelo* 12.11–27. ⁵³ Psellos, *Theologica* I 50, p. 195.56–102.

⁵⁴ Italos, *Quaestiones* 42.

Platonic elements in the context of his debate with Scholarios over the primacy between Plato and Aristotle.⁵⁵

There were also minor points of disagreement with Aristotle, not based on religious concerns, which rather resulted from the individual scholarship of different Byzantine scholars. For example, while praising Aristotle as a good physiologist and logician,⁵⁶ Psellos deems Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* as inferior to the Hippocratic *On Nutriment*. As to writings on human nature, Psellos prefers Galen (*De usu partium*) and regards Aristotle's zoological treatises as unoriginal and derivative.⁵⁷ But almost all criticisms of this sort are found in Nikephoros Gregoras' *Florentios* (written in the first half of the fourteenth century), which is philosophically probably the most important anti-Aristotelian manifesto written in Byzantium.⁵⁸ Likewise, in his commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* I, Eustratios of Nicaea defends Plato against Aristotle's critiques of the Platonic ideas and the Ideal Good.⁵⁹ This leads him far from Simplikios' recommendations that a commentator should avoid partisanship.⁶⁰ In the twelfth century, Aristotle would be defended against his Neoplatonic critics by Nicholas of Methone, the author of a *Refutation of Proklos' Elements of Theology*. This work utilizes Aristotle's *Physics* as a tool for challenging Proklos' theory of causation.⁶¹

OBSCURE STYLE AND INCOHERENCE

Just as the appraisal of Aristotle's works had changed since late antiquity, some of the late antique *topoi* on the Philosopher's style were also subject to transformation. Aristotle's obscurity (*asapheia*) is the most evident case. Late antique commentators regarded Aristotle's lack of clarity as a deliberate authorial practice for preserving profound philosophical teachings from untrained and superficial readers.⁶² In Byzantium, however, a negative view of this authorial trait is apparent in several texts. This is not to say that the arguments defending Aristotle's concision were unknown to Byzantine scholars,⁶³ but there was a strong tendency to look at his brevity as a flaw, rather than a virtue. Here too the stage had been set earlier by the Middle Platonist Atticus⁶⁴ and Christian authors

⁵⁵ Plethon, *Against Scholarios' Arguments in Favor of Aristotle* 29. On the debate, see Hankins 1990b: 165–263; Monfasani 2002; Karamanolis 2002. On Scholarios' scholarship on Aristotle, see Demetracopoulos (in progress), upon which the present chapter depends.

⁵⁶ Cf. n. 11 above. ⁵⁷ Psellos, *Encomium for Xiphilinos* 461.1–462.21; see Bydén 2013: 170.

⁵⁸ Bydén 2012b. ⁵⁹ Eustratios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* I 44.13–58.13.

⁶⁰ Giocarinis 1964. ⁶¹ Trizio 2014b.

⁶² E.g. Ammonios, *In Cat.* 7.7–14; Simplikios, *In Cat.* 7.1–22; see Hadot 1990: 113–122; Erler 1991.

⁶³ E.g. Scholarios, *Against Plethon's Ignorance of Aristotle* 8.13–29, responding to Plethon, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato* 328.10–12.

⁶⁴ Atticus, fr. 9.13.

such as pseudo-Justin Martyr.⁶⁵ Around the middle of the twelfth century, the Consul of Philosophers Michael of Anchialos called Aristotle “the Sphinx of Stagira” and referred to the intricacies of his logic as *griphoi*,⁶⁶ “riddles,” a word whose negative connotation is also attested by Mauropous (eleventh century).⁶⁷ Some Byzantine scholars exhibit a more nuanced approach. Psellos, for instance, is aware of the function attributed by earlier commentators to Aristotle’s obscure style, but nevertheless disdains it as unpleasant, especially when compared to his hero in rhetoric and theology Gregory of Nazianzos.⁶⁸ Probably the most famous discussion of Aristotle’s abstruseness is found in Metochites’ *Semeioseis gnomikai*, which counters the late antique amelioration of Aristotle’s obscurity by arguing that through it Aristotle sought to conceal his own ignorance rather than any profound teachings.⁶⁹ However, just as Psellos was aware of the earlier favorable reading, Metochites also admits (elsewhere) that Aristotle’s brevity aimed to keep uninitiated readers away from his core doctrines.⁷⁰

Some Byzantine scholars agreed that the Philosopher was not coherent or consistent when discussing the same topic in different works. In this respect as well the late antique commentators had mostly defended the internal coherence of the corpus,⁷¹ while their Christian counterparts stressed Aristotle’s inconsistency as proof of the unreliability of his philosophy.⁷² Psellos compares Aristotle to the Lernaean Hydra, whose many heads kept growing back when cut off. The mythological reference probably means that, whenever Aristotle seems to provide a final solution to a relevant problem, the same problem arises somewhere else where it is discussed in an ambiguous manner. However, Psellos maintains that the Hydra differs from Aristotle in that, while the former’s many heads are identical with each other, Aristotle’s many arguments always differ one from another.⁷³

It is again Metochites who provides the most interesting philosophical appraisal of Aristotle’s alleged inconsistencies. Just as obscurity was a sign of his inability to provide the reader with definitive answers, so in Metochites’ view the lack of coherence in the corpus reflects Aristotle’s disingenuous attempt to deceive his readers and, ultimately, the philosopher’s pretentiousness.⁷⁴ Since, as has been argued, Metochites’

⁶⁵ Pseudo-Justin, *Confutatio* 117A–B. ⁶⁶ Michael of Anchialos, *Inaugural Lecture* 190.106–107.

⁶⁷ Mauropous, *Novella* 23.12. ⁶⁸ Psellos, *Theologica* II 6, pp. 12–36.

⁶⁹ Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai* 3; also *Letter to a Friend on the Death of Joseph the Philosopher* 11.16–17.

⁷⁰ Metochites, *In De somno* 11.16–25. ⁷¹ Baltussen 2008: 88–105.

⁷² E.g. pseudo-Justin, *Confutatio* 127A–E (inconsistencies in *De caelo*).

⁷³ Psellos, *Philosophica minora* I 5, pp. 16.58–17.72; also Plethon, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato* 327.35; other passages in Bydén 2013: 156 n. 36.

⁷⁴ Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai* 3.1.4–9, 3.2.4–6, 3.6.5–7.

assumptions are skeptical, his approach to this traditional *topos* appears to be quite innovative, in fact hostile.⁷⁵

LITERARY GENRES AND FIGURES

Aristotelian scholarship in Byzantium appears in a variety of literary genres, including references to Aristotelian works in letters, dialogues, and writings of all other sorts. I shall confine the present analysis only to commentaries in the strict sense of the word, i.e. more or less systematic expositions written for exegetical purposes, because they make up the bulk of the relevant texts. These include: (1) paraphrases, *epitomai*, and *prolegomena* or *protheoroumena*; (2) essays or treatises; (3) scholia; (4) longer, running commentaries on the text. An important characteristic of the commentary tradition is the dependence of later authors on earlier sources in a continuous chain of intertextuality.

I begin with paraphrases, *epitomai*, and *prolegomena* or *protheoroumena* on Aristotle's work, which dominate the landscape of commentary in Byzantium. They occur as isolated pieces on one text or, especially in late Byzantium, as a set of paraphrases or *epitomai* devoted to different works. The first class includes isolated paraphrases such as the previously mentioned paraphrase on *De interpretatione* by Psellos. The latter is also credited with a *metaphrasis* – i.e. a paraphrase, in the Byzantine philosophical vocabulary⁷⁶ – on *Prior Analytics* 1,⁷⁷ and possibly another on *Posterior Analytics* 2, attributed to Psellos by the sixteenth-century Latin translator of the text, Maximos Margounios.⁷⁸ Sophonias composed paraphrases of Aristotle's *De anima*, *Prior Analytics* 1, *Parva naturalia*, *Categories*, and *Sophistical Refutation*. An anonymous late paraphrase of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, falsely attributed to Andronikos of Rhodes, Olympiodoros, and Heliodoros of Prusa (the latter name an invention of the sixteenth-century forger Konstantinos Paleokappa) was copied in 1366 at the expense of the former emperor John VI Kantakuzenos (d. 1383). The second class includes Metochites' paraphrases of the *Parva naturalia*, *Physics*, *De anima*, *De coelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *Meteorologica*, and *De sensu*. The *Metaphysics* is not on this list, for Metochites thought it a pretentious work dealing with a subject unattainable to human knowledge.⁷⁹ Metochites' corpus of paraphrases on Aristotle's natural philosophy later became the source for Scholarios' paraphrases on the same works. Scholarios also translated a hitherto unidentified Latin paraphrase of Aristotle's *Physics* and an epitome on *Meteorologica*, which depends on Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary.

⁷⁵ Bydén 2002. ⁷⁶ Blumenthal 1979. ⁷⁷ Unedited: Moore 2005: 246.

⁷⁸ Moore 2005: 250; Cacouras 1994–1995. ⁷⁹ Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai* 21.1.1–6.

Like paraphrases, *epitomai*, *synopses*, and *compendia* can also be found isolated or grouped. Around 1100, Theodore of Smyrna composed an *Epitome of Physics and Natural Principles* that discusses, via the commentators, the main issues of Aristotle's *Physics*. An interest in natural philosophy, which was mostly though not exclusively dependent on Aristotelian writings, is also exhibited by the *Conspectus rerum naturalium* attributed to Symeon Seth. As we saw above, Blemmydes composed two *Epitomai* devoted to logic and physics respectively. However, later on the scholars of Byzantium would regard as insufficient the production of isolated exegetical works on individual texts, and they turned to the production of sets of *compendia* or *epitomai*. Pachymeres, for example, produced a set of *synopses* of the Aristotelian works which, in his view, were most worthy of transmission and study. Known as "Philosophia", this exegetical work is divided into twelve books, each devoted to a specific Aristotelian text, from the better-known logical works to the traditionally underestimated and spurious *De coloribus* and *De lineis insecabilibus*. After Pachymeres, the idea of gathering together all branches of wisdom in one and the same "encyclopedic" project became dominant.⁸⁰ An example of this trend is the *Synopsis variarum disciplinarum* composed by Joseph Rhakendites (d. c. 1330) in the last period of his life;⁸¹ it was known and praised as an important reference work by Nikephoros Gregoras.⁸² In the prefatory verses and the preface of the *Synopsis*, Joseph makes it clear that he wished not only to assemble the material that earlier scholars had treated in a disperse manner, but to fill the gap in the *epitomai* composed by earlier scholars on specific topics.

Prolegomena and *protheoroumena* (literally "introductory notes") were also used for commenting on Aristotle, but in different ways. Scholarios, for example, composed *Prolegomena* to Aristotle's logic noted for their dependence on Latin sources. He also composed *Prolegomena* to Aristotle's *Physics* made of excerpts from the commentators, in particular Simplicios, and *Protheoroumena* to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Scholarios may have inherited the tendency to produce *protheoroumena* and *prolegomena* from his teacher, the patriarchal notary and later bishop of Selymbria John Chortasmenos (c. 1370–1437), who left *Prolegomena* to Aristotle's logic. To these one should also add the excerpts, either from earlier prologues to commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, or paraphrased passages of the same Aristotelian works, made by Chortasmenos himself and known as *Prolegomena philosophiae* (transmitted e.g. in mss. Vindob. suppl. Gr. 75, fols. 11–12v and Laur. Plut. 71.17, fols. 1–8r). Excerpts from Aristotle's

⁸⁰ For the term and its tradition, see Van Deun and Macé 2011: iii–xix.

⁸¹ Terzaghi 1902; Criscuolo 1974; Gielen 2013. ⁸² Gregoras, *Letter* 13, p. 57.2–6 (ed. Guiland).

Rhetoric, 1–3 were copied by Chortasmenos in ms. Riccard. Gr. 58, fols. 33v–42v.⁸³

Next, there were treatises discussing individual works, or more often one of its parts. These occur frequently in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, either in the form of question-and-answer literature,⁸⁴ or as essays presented as a “short account” (*ekdosis syntomos*) or “short introduction” (*ephodos syntomos*) or even “summary” (*synopsis*). Psellos and his pupil Italos authored several of these short treatises, which mostly (though not exclusively) deal with logical issues. Their intended audience consisted of both students and members of the aristocracy who had an interest in philosophy. The first class includes, among others, a class-report of a lecture given by Italos on the status of contrary terms in *De interpretatione*. To the latter belong, among others, a piece by Psellos on the importance of studying the *Organon* addressed to the *droungarios tes vigles* (a high-ranking military commander) Constantine Xiphilinos; a short treatise on homonymy and synonymy (relating to the first part of the *Categories*) addressed to a certain Alopos, the *logothetes tou dromou* (another high official); the well-known *De omnifaria doctrina*, addressed to Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078); and a summary of Porphyry’s *Eisagoge* addressed to John Doukas, brother of the emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067). As for Italos, for the benefit of Michael VII he composed a piece on the immortality of the soul, consisting of excerpts from Philoponos’ commentary on Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, while for Andronikos Doukas, another member of the dynasty, Italos wrote a longer piece on dialectics.

These texts stemmed from the practice of reading and excerpting from earlier sources, including the late antique commentators and Church Fathers such as John of Damascus. Sometimes, as in Italos’ piece on Aristotle’s *Topics* 2–4, the entire text is made up of excerpts (in this case from Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary on the *Topics*). In other cases, the excerpts are taken from a wider range of sources and are harmonized into a more autonomous argumentative strategy. It seems that these scholars worked by preparing drafts or personal notes which could later be used for writing different pieces when the occasion arose. An important witness of this is ms. Barocci 131, preserving among other things what was probably a kind of archive of personal notes and excerpts taken by Psellos, which he used for different purposes.⁸⁵ Later single treatises on Aristotelian works would be composed by Scholarios, who authored a piece on the *Categories* known to depend upon Gilbertus Porretanus’ *De sex principiis*.⁸⁶ The same author translated Peter of Spain’s *Summulae logicales* and

⁸³ Ebbesen 1981: v. 1, 344–350.

⁸⁴ See Chapter 3.

⁸⁵ Wilson 1978; Pérez Martín 2013a; 2013c.

⁸⁶ Ebbesen and Pinborg 1981–82.

authored treatises against Plethon in defense of Aristotle and the compatibility of Aristotle with Christianity.

With respect to philosophical literature, the term “scholia” refers (1) to a copyist’s addition of exegetical notes taken from earlier material in the margins of a text for facilitating its understanding, or (2) to a proper commentary made up from interpretative notes by the author himself on each lemma of the text. They can overlap in that scholia of the second kind may become the source for later scholia found in the margins of a text; or, by contrast, scholia of the first kind may be the source for later scholia of the second kind.⁸⁷

The most famous case-study for scholia of the first kind is surely the ninth-century ms. Urb. Gr. 35, containing Porphyry’s *Eisagoge*, the *Categories*, and commentaries on other Aristotle logical works, a manuscript commissioned by Arethas of Caesarea.⁸⁸ At fols. 2–29 (*Eisagoge* and *Categories* to 4b15), Arethas himself added marginal notes and excerpts taken from ancient and late antique sources, some of which have yet to be identified.⁸⁹ Even though these notes are not a commentary proper, they form a coherent whole which must have worked as a commentary tool for readers. There are several other later manuscripts of the *corpus aristotelicum* in which the Philosopher’s text is framed by several excerpts or scholia from earlier material.⁹⁰ Obviously the consistency of the final result depended on the skill of the compiler and the intended readership. The number of sources from which Byzantine scholars prepared their marginal notes also fluctuated. In general, manuscripts containing Aristotle’s logical works often contain marginalia taken from a standard set of sources, mostly the late antique and Byzantine commentators. This generated a complex process of progressive stratification of scholia. Even though the different layers were not a commentary proper, they nonetheless functioned as a commentary tool for the later users of a manuscript.

In the vocabulary of Byzantine scholars, “scholia” is also used to refer to their own exegetical notes, forming either a whole commentary or a set of unconnected notes. This second practice was probably the most widespread and varied among different scholars. Michael of Ephesos was perhaps the most prolific of all Byzantine commentators and the most representative for this type of commentary.⁹¹ Michael lists commentaries on *Parva naturalia*, *De partibus animalium*, *De incessu animalium*, *De motu animalium*, *De generatione animalium*, *Metaphysica Z-N*, and the spurious *De coloribus*.⁹² In the commentary on the *Sophistici Elenchi* commonly

⁸⁷ McNamee 1995; Cavallo 2002; Wilson 2007; Montana 2011; Schironi 2012.

⁸⁸ Follieri 1973–1974; for Arethas, see Wilson 1983: 120–135; Luzzatto 2010.

⁸⁹ Anton 1997; Rashed 2005. ⁹⁰ Kotzabassi 2010. ⁹¹ Golitsis 2015.

⁹² Michael of Ephesos, *In parva naturalia* 149.8–16.

attributed to him,⁹³ the author claims to have also written commentaries on *Topics*, *Analytics*, *Physics*, and *Rhetoric*, none of which has yet been identified. Michael also wrote extant commentaries on *Nicomachean Ethics* 5, 9 and 10, probably at the request of Anne Komnene,⁹⁴ and possibly on *De interpretatione*, fragments of which survive in Par. Gr. 1917 (17r–45).⁹⁵ Notes on the *Politics*, which contain Michael's comments on the political situation of his time, are also extant. Some interesting personal comments attributed to Michael in the commentary tradition on the *Metaphysics* are also preserved in Par. Gr. 1901.⁹⁶

Other commentaries made up of notes or scholia include an anonymous commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* 7 that has been tentatively dated to the thirteenth century,⁹⁷ an anonymous commentary on the *Rhetoric*, and a commentary on the same work attributed to Stephanos Skylitzes, bishop of Trebizond.⁹⁸ In his commentary, Stephanos also mentions his own scholia on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which have yet to be identified.⁹⁹ No less problematic is the case of Leo Magentinos (twelfth or thirteenth century?). Magentinos' biography is largely unknown, and his works are largely unedited and understudied. He commented on Aristotle's logical works (*Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Topics*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics* 1 (the first seven chapters), *Sophistici Elenchi*, and Porphyry's *Eisagoge*).¹⁰⁰ Also unpublished is a work (an explanation of a diagram) on *Prior Analytics* attributed in Vat. Reg. Gr. 116 (fol. 133rv) to an otherwise unknown Alousianos.¹⁰¹

Aristotle was also read and interpreted far from Constantinople in areas that formerly belonged to the empire. There are, for example, several works of the *corpus aristotelicum* (mainly the logical ones) and its commentators that circulated and were produced in the Salento area, in southern Italy, by scholars originating among the Greek-speaking population.¹⁰² The case of the early fourteenth-century poet, philologist, and *didaskalos* Drosos of Aradeo¹⁰³ is worth mentioning with respect to Par. suppl. Gr. 599 (copied in the region of Salento), which preserves (at fols. 7–104v) Aristotle's *De interpretatione* with marginal scholia from Psellos' paraphrase and from Drosos' own *aposemeioseis* (literally "notes").¹⁰⁴

More is known about Neophytos Prodromenos, a monk at the Prodromos-Petra monastery in Constantinople in the fourteenth

⁹³ Praechter 1906; Ebbesen 1981: v. 1, 268–285. ⁹⁴ Mercken 1990.

⁹⁵ Later lists of Byzantine commentators mention an unidentified commentary by Michael on the spurious *De lineis insecabilibus*. Harlfinger 1971: 99–100.

⁹⁶ Hadot 1987; Golitsis 2014. ⁹⁷ Fisher 2009.

⁹⁸ Wolska-Conus 1976a. On the reception of the *Rhetoric*, see Conley 1990.

⁹⁹ Stephanos Skylitzes, *In rhet.* 277.28. ¹⁰⁰ Ebbesen 1981: v. 1, 303–313; Bydén 2011.

¹⁰¹ Harlfinger 1971: 45. ¹⁰² Arnesano 2006.

¹⁰³ Acconcia Longo and Jacob 1980–1982: 266–267.

¹⁰⁴ Wartelle 1963: 119 (no. 1604); Mondrain 2000b: 26–28; Cacouros and Hoffmann 2005: 27–30.

century.¹⁰⁵ Like many late Byzantine scholars, Neophytos exemplifies a multifarious approach to Aristotle. He was at once scribe, annotator, and scholar who left two series of *aposemeioseis* on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* 1 and *Posterior Analytics* 1, and an *epitome* of Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and of the rest of Aristotle's logical works.¹⁰⁶ Prodrornos also composed and copied out a short introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* (in Vat. Gr. 1018, fol. 1) accompanied by short marginal notes.¹⁰⁷ John Chortasmenos presents a similar profile, that is a complex set of authorial practices which do not fall easily into fixed categories. For example, in Vindob. suppl. Gr. 75 Chortasmenos produced a series of excerpts (in the main text) from the *Posterior Analytics* (fols. 219r–229r) and *Topics* 1 (229v–233v). He calls these excerpts “definitional abridged chapters” (*oroi kat' epitomen kephalaioideis*),¹⁰⁸ each introduced by the Greek particle *oti*. The lemmata are found in red ink near the corresponding proposition, thus allowing the reader to connect each passage of the text with the corresponding explanatory note.

John Pothos Pediasimos (b. c.1250, d. early thirteenth century), a pupil of Akropolites and later Consul of Philosophers,¹⁰⁹ composed scholia or notes on the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* and *De interpretatione*.¹¹⁰ The scholar and monk Manuel Holobolos,¹¹¹ who was probably also Pediasimos' teacher,¹¹² is said to have commented on the *Prior Analytics*, though recently this has been refuted.¹¹³ Holobolos nevertheless deserves a place of honor in the history of Byzantine logic for translating Boethius' *De topicis differentiis* and *De hypotheticis syllogismis* into Greek. He probably wanted to provide Byzantine readers with further dialectical tools for theological argumentation which had been discussed less in the earlier Greek Aristotelian tradition.¹¹⁴

The erudite and pro-Palamite monk Isaac Argyros (a pupil of Nikephoros Gregoras) produced notes on some of Aristotle's logical works of which some scholia on the *De interpretatione* survive in Ambr. B 103 suppl. and Vat. Gr. 1777, and notes on the *Analytics* in Vat. Reg. 116. His contemporary Joseph Philagrius also exemplifies late Byzantine scholarship on the *corpus aristotelicum*.¹¹⁵ He approached the corpus as both a scribe and a scholar, composing exegetical notes on the *Organon*. He

¹⁰⁵ *PLP* 19254. A tentative list of his works in Lundström 1903–1904: 151–153.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. in Vindob. phil. Gr. 277; Vat. Gr. 1018; Vat. urb. Gr. 80; and Laur. Plut. Gr. 71.32 (the latter containing only the part on *De interpretatione*).

¹⁰⁷ Cacouros 1995: 274. ¹⁰⁸ Hunger 1969: 32–33. ¹⁰⁹ Constantinides 1982: 116–125.

¹¹⁰ Preserved in Par. Coisl. Gr. 323 (fol. 42v), mentioned by Busse 1897: li.

¹¹¹ Bydén 2004: 137–146. ¹¹² Constantinides 1982: 119.

¹¹³ Treu 1896: 552–553; contra: Bydén 2004: 146–149.

¹¹⁴ Ierodiakonou 1996; in general, see Fisher 2011.

¹¹⁵ Petit 1925; on the title “*didaskalos* of Crete” attributed to him, see Mergiali-Falangas 1994: 183–185.

copied and arranged almost all the material preserved in Ang. Gr. 30,¹¹⁶ to which he added Neilos Kabasilas' work on syllogisms and a piece on hypothetical syllogisms. This suggests once again that, as with Holobolos' translation of Boethius, Philagrius had an interest in applying Aristotelian logic to theological matters.

While Michael of Ephesos maintained the late antique habit of providing first a general commentary on a lemma (*theoria*) and then more specific focus on its parts (*lexis*), it was his colleague Eustratios of Nicaea who followed the methodology of the late antique commentators most closely. His commentaries on *Posterior Analytics* 2 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1 and 6 match those written in late antiquity in length and more consistently reflect the practice of dividing exegesis into a more general and a more detailed level. After Eustratios, Theodore Prodromos composed a commentary on *Posterior Analytics* 2 which is known for depending upon Eustratios' own exegesis of the same text.¹¹⁷ As for Pachymeres, he composed not only the *Philosophia*, as we said, but also commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *Organon*.¹¹⁸ Late medieval Latin commentaries on Aristotle became available as well thanks to Scholarios, who translated Aquinas' commentaries on the *Sophistici Elenchi*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*. It was not, then, until quite late that Byzantine scholars perceived that Aristotle was being studied in depth in the west as well.

CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Though dependent on late antique sources, the Byzantine reception of Aristotle involves a complex series of authorial and textual practices which, at least in part, the Byzantines developed independently from the classical heritage. There remains a tremendous amount of unedited or little-studied material, so our understanding of *Aristoteles Byzantinus* is as yet incomplete. The project *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina*, sponsored by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, will surely fill some gaps in our knowledge in the coming years.¹¹⁹ This is a project whose historical importance for the western reception of Aristotle is comparable to that of the edition itself of Aristotle and the commentators by Aldus Manutius as well as the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* project produced by the most important German philologists at the turn of the twentieth century. However, before the Renaissance, the west profited from Byzantine scholarship on Aristotle and the commentators: first, in the twelfth century, through the

¹¹⁶ Described by Reinsch in 1967 <http://cagb-db.bbaw.de/handschriften/handschrift.xql?id=55937>.

¹¹⁷ Cacouros 1994–1995. ¹¹⁸ Golitsis 2008b. ¹¹⁹ www.bbaw.de/forschung/cagb/ubersicht.

collaboration between Burgundio of Pisa and the scribe Ioannikios,¹²⁰ then in the thirteenth century through the translations from Greek into Latin carried out by various scholars.¹²¹ It was then that western scholars realized that Aristotle was read not only in the Arab world, but by Byzantine scholars as well. But this is another story.

¹²⁰ Degni 2008. ¹²¹ Dod 1982; Brans 2003.

IV.3

INDIVIDUALS IN CONTEXT

CHAPTER 24
MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

PHIL BOOTH

Maximos the Confessor has long divided opinion. A controversial and isolated intellectual within his own lifetime (580–662), when the Christological position that he supported was vindicated at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680/1), he was not mentioned. Maximos' rehabilitation was a protracted process, gaining most momentum in the post-Iconoclastic period, when his actions in defense of doctrine were upheld as an example of the Church's autonomy from secular interference.¹ But even then some critics hesitated over his abilities. Thus the patriarch Photios, describing Maximos' *Questions to Thalassios*, admired his acumen for allegorical contemplation, but condemned his penchant for linguistic obscurantism.² Translators of Maximos' Greek will no doubt empathize.

Modern theologians are almost unanimous in recognizing Maximos' considerable learning and genius. But some historians demonstrate a distinct unease in their assessment. Thus one recent critic – as part of a wider argument which presents the Islamic caliphate as the heir proper to late antique intellectual culture – passes over Maximos as being of minor philosophical aptitude and interest;³ another – arguing that the reign of Justinian had precipitated the triumph of a malign Christian “monodoxie” which suppressed all cultural pluralism – instead constructs him as the champion of an anti-ecclesial “platonisme ambiant,” resistant to “l'aridité du dogme et la sclérose du rite,” and preserving “le génie de l'hellénisme.”⁴ I will argue that neither assessment withstands examination. But these critics' arguments point to a clear problem: that is, Maximos' corpus cannot find a comfortable place in narratives which construct his lifetime as one of unambiguous intellectual regression, introversion, or decline, or which see contemporary Christian culture as incapable of innovation, pluralism, and dissent.

We cannot here survey the full range of Maximos' interests; readers can access several excellent introductions.⁵ I will instead highlight the more prominent aspects of his thought, in particular his contributions to

¹ For Maximos' reception, see Price 2014: 105–108. ² Photios, *Bibliothèque* cod. 192A.

³ Fowden 2014: 149. ⁴ Athanassiadi 2010: 126–131. ⁵ Thunberg 1985; Louth 1996.

Christological doctrine and to political philosophy. At the same time, I will situate these aspects in the context of Maximos' life, a period of unprecedented disorder. Through his remarkable career – which took him to such diverse centres as Jerusalem, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, and Constantinople – we can trace a world in which the political and cultural plates were realigning, in which Constantinopolitan and Persian emperors, Arabian caliphs, and Roman popes vied for position. By following the progression in Maximos' thought throughout his movements across this landscape, we can uncover the profile of a Christian intellectual born into a world of assumed Roman dominance in the eastern Mediterranean, but who died in a Christian Roman state on the verge of oblivion.

BEYOND THE FATHERS

Among the most important of Maximos' texts we can count the *Book on the Ascetic Life*, the *Centuries on Love*, the *Ambigua to John*, the *Questions to Thalassios*, the *Questions and Doubts*, the *Mystagogy*, and the pieces gathered as the *Letters* and *Opuscula*.⁶ The corpus ranges across various themes (ascetical, liturgical, exegetical, doctrinal, philosophical, etc.) and genres (questions and answers, centuries, commentaries, letters, dialogues, etc.). In none of these, however, does Maximos present a comprehensive account of his theology. Each is instead occasional, addressed to individuals and focused on a particular topic, sometimes in response to a request.⁷

Within this diverse output, it is nevertheless possible to trace the operation of a systematic mind. Indeed, much recent scholarship has devoted itself to the disinterment of the basic structures of Maximos' thought, demonstrating in particular how the principles expressed in the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Incarnation further pervade and orient his entire theological vision.⁸ Therein, Maximos avails himself of various patristic sources. His Christological impulses derive from the "Alexandrian" tradition of Athanasios, the Cappadocians, and Cyril, and from the Neo-Chalcedonism of the Leontioi; he is the spiritual heir to Evagrius, pseudo-Makarios, and Diadochos; and his cosmological vision owes much to pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite.⁹ Maximos thus situates himself within a continuous theological tradition, and his achievement was in part the integration of its divergent strands.

His contribution to the thought of the Chalcedonian east is, however, far more significant than his systematization of its fundamental currents. It is increasingly apparent, for example, that Maximos enriches the

⁶ See *CPG* 7688–7711. For the corpus in full, with dates, see Jankowiak and Booth 2015.

⁷ Louth 1996: 20–22. ⁸ Kattan 2003; Cooper 2005; Töronen 2007; Tollefsen 2008.

⁹ Louth 1996: 22–32.

tradition through independent if critical recourse to concepts derived from Aristotle and the Neoplatonists,¹⁰ while his own elaboration of that tradition, though couched in conservative rhetoric, makes momentous intellectual advances, in particular in relation to the Christological and anthropological will. His theological system, therefore, is not static, but was enriched and elaborated over time, and in dialogue with others both allied and opposed.

EARLIEST EDUCATION

A basic problem for understanding Maximos' intellectual formation is the obscurity of his earliest career. There is a startling divergence between the later Greek hagiographic corpus, which presents Maximos as a Constantinopolitan aristocrat and administrator before his retreat into monasticism, and a contemporary invective, extant in a single Syriac manuscript, which places his birth in the Golan and his formative years in the monasteries of Palestine.¹¹ In recent literature the Greek narrative has been assailed from various directions. The tradition, which contains obvious anachronisms,¹² originated in the eighth or ninth century, and one suspects that Maximos' earliest hagiographers in Greek, confronted with a dearth of information for his earliest career, made it conform to the dominant expectations for middle Byzantine ascetics.¹³ In contrast, the Syriac *Life* comes from a contemporary, George of Resh'aina, who demonstrates a striking awareness of biographical or historical details known to be accurate from other sources.¹⁴ Can we then trust his account of Maximos' Palestinian career? The problem, of course, is that George is an implacable opponent of Maximos, so that when he reports on Maximos' ignoble parentage we suspect polemic. But it seems doubtful that George's picture of Maximos' Palestinian training is also polemical, or that it would have been possible, before an audience of contemporaries, to displace his entire career.¹⁵

If Maximos is (re-)placed within a Palestinian context, the temptation arises to trace Palestinian influences within his thought. Although the

¹⁰ Mueller-Jourdan 2005; Benevitch 2011–2012; Lauritzen 2012; Bathrellos 2013. The extent and mechanisms of that borrowing remain unclear: Tollefsen 2008: 13–16.

¹¹ For the Greek hagiographic corpus – several *passiones* and a *Life* – see Roosen 2010. For the Syriac *Life* (= George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life of Maximus*), see Brock 1973.

¹² Lackner 1971. ¹³ Allen 1985; Boudignon 2004; Roosen 2010; Booth 2013: 143–149.

¹⁴ E.g. the knowledge of Maximos' movements between Africa, Sicily, and Rome; his association with the North African *hyparchos* George; and the settlement of his allies at *Cella Nova* in Rome at George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 20–24.

¹⁵ On the "internal evidence" for Maximos' Constantinopolitan career (in particular his association with persons in or around the capital), see the prosopographical section in Jankowiak and Booth 2015; contra Larchet 1996: 8–12.

cosmopolitan nature of late antique religious culture precludes definitive solutions, Palestinian intellectuals appear as a central influence. Specifically, his understanding of various Christological terms is much indebted to the Neo-Chalcedonism of Leontios of Byzantion and Leontios of Jerusalem,¹⁶ while his evident interest in pseudo-Dionysios recapitulates and expands the activities of another Palestinian, John of Scythopolis.¹⁷ At the same time, much within Maximos' earliest output is a selective critique of the Origenist tradition, refuting its more controversial proto-logical and cosmological doctrines but nevertheless salvaging its rich exegetical and spiritual insight.¹⁸ This too is perhaps suggestive of a Palestinian formation since here, during the reign of Justinian, Chalcedonian monastics had engaged in a high-profile dispute over "Origenist" doctrine. Recent literature orients that dispute around the same issue evident in some of the earliest Maximian texts, that is, the need to disentangle Origenist (in particular, Evagrius) ascetic insight from its original doctrinal matrix.¹⁹ It is therefore notable that George of Resh'aina accuses Maximos of having trained under an "Origenist" at the Palaia Laura.²⁰ Maximos' interest in Origen and Evagrius made this an obvious accusation for enemies, and here George too omits the purpose of this training in Origenism.²¹ The mention of Maximos' institution provides a crucial clue, however, for in the generation before him the Palaia Laura (also called "Souka") appears as a bastion in the battle *against* Origenism.²²

While it is probable that Maximos was a product of Palestinian monasticism, the problem remains of his movements between 600 and 630, for which the Syriac *Life* is silent. That same period witnessed the Persians' invasion and subsequent occupation of Rome's eastern provinces, including the capture of Jerusalem in 614. In 632 we find Maximos at Carthage, a self-confessed refugee from "barbarian" pressure.²³ What was his route to the west? The evidence permits no more than speculation, but it is possible that he followed the same path as another Palestinian ascetic, Sophronios, whose disciple Maximos had become at some point before 632.²⁴ We know that in the reign of Phokas (602–610), and under threat of Persian invasion, Sophronios had abandoned Palestine and retreated to Antioch, and then traveled to Alexandria, where he remained for (at least some of) the first decade of the emperor Herakleios' rule (610–641),²⁵ before traveling to

¹⁶ Bathrellos 2004: 39–54. ¹⁷ Suchla 1980.

¹⁸ Sherwood 1955; Dalmais 1961; Cooper 2005: 65–95. ¹⁹ Hombergen 2001; Booth 2013: 15–33.

²⁰ *Syriac Life* 4. ²¹ The same accusation appears in the *Record of the Trial*.

²² Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Kyriakos* 11–15 (pp. 229–235).

²³ Maximos, *Letter 8* (PG 91:445A), with Devreesse 1937; Booth 2013: 164–165.

²⁴ Maximos, *Letter 8* (PG 91:440D–445A), with Devreesse 1937: 35, calling himself "your servant and disciple." Cf. *Letter 13* (PG 91:533A) (c. 633/4).

²⁵ *Prologue to the Spiritual Meadow*, 91–93, with Booth 2013: 49–53 for supporting evidence.

North Africa.²⁶ That Maximos trod a similar path – whether in the entourage of Sophronios, or as part of a wider Palestinian ascetic diaspora – must remain uncertain. But there is some reason to associate him also with Alexandria.

Critics of the notion of Maximos' Palestinian origins have sometimes said that a man of his considerable intelligence cannot have been trained in the Judean deserts, but must have received his education in Constantinople.²⁷ We need not assume, however, that Maximos' education occurred in a single period or place, or that Constantinople was the sole center for higher education. Indeed, recent research has pointed to the frequent association of Maximos' later correspondents not with Constantinople but with Alexandria, and suggested that Maximos might (like Sophronios) have been there in the 610s, mixing amidst its intellectuals.²⁸ It has long been recognized that he had studied and absorbed the philosophical classics: Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*.²⁹ It now seems almost certain that he also authored a text *On the Isagoge of Porphyry and Aristotle's Categories*, lost but excerpted in two (perhaps three) other extant texts. The lost common source derives from the lecture notes of David the Invincible, one of the last representatives of the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, and reflects the Alexandrian philosophical curriculum as it existed, at least, in the earlier part of Maximos' lifetime.³⁰ Our lost source, therefore, provides a striking complement to recent speculation on Maximos' Alexandrian education and to the continuity between late antiquity and seventh-century thought.

THE MAKING OF A DISSIDENT

The gap in our knowledge of Maximos' life coincides with Herakleios' spectacular resurgence against and defeat of the Persian empire (by 628/9). Modern historians tend to laud the emperor's achievement, but Maximos was far less effusive. In order to comprehend this reaction, and indeed his persistent indifference to Constantinopolitan claims, we must bear in mind his status throughout the previous decades as a refugee, an exile from a homeland under foreign occupation. At the same time, we should also remember the paradigm of collective sin and divine punishment in which Maximos' contemporaries had come to interpret the Roman defeats.³¹ From this perspective, we might then better appreciate Maximos' reaction to the Roman resurgence, which could not reverse

²⁶ Maximos, *Opusculum* 12 (PG 91:142A). ²⁷ Larchet 1996: 8–12.

²⁸ Boudignon 2004: 15–22, with 37–41. For Sophronios' possible association with Alexandrian philosophers, see Wolska-Conus 1989.

²⁹ Lackner 1962. ³⁰ Roosen 2001: 883–898. ³¹ Flusin 1992: v. 2, 129–149; Olster 1994.

the long periods of personal exile inflicted through imperial failure, nor indeed promise the moral renewal which alone could restore divine favor.

In 628 or 629 Maximos dispatched a letter to the imperial official Constantine Sakellarios in which he thanked him for communicating “news of a peace on earth” (*sc.* the end of the Persian war), but warned him that God’s gift of peace did not entail affection for the world and its rule: it should instead prompt the renewal of the war against the passions, indulgence in which had fomented God’s anger in the first place.³² Perhaps around the same time, in a letter to another official, John the *cubicularius*, Maximos responded to a perhaps leading question: “How is it that God has judged it right that men be ruled by other men?” In his response he offers the standard Christian account: the Fall introduced disorder into man and the cosmos, so God has introduced the distinction of ruler and ruled in order to marshal those who are obedient to the laws of nature and punish those who ignore them. The emperor who maintains his rule in accordance with divine ordinances, Maximos insists, is God’s lieutenant on earth. But, he then adds in an ominous conclusion, the emperor who ignores these ordinances will rebut good men, remove himself from all counsel, and appoint the impious to positions of power. This, Maximos warns, is “a final pit of destruction for both rulers and ruled.”³³

Although we cannot determine the precise chronological context for the letter to John, in 632 Maximos dispatched from North Africa a letter to Sophronios in which he reports a recent forced baptism of African Jews and Samaritans, carried out under imperial fiat.³⁴ The baptism appears to have been part of a wider ideological program emphasizing both the *renovatio* of the Roman empire and the eschatological dimensions of Herakleios’ reign.³⁵ That program manifests itself in Heraclian court rhetoric after the departure of the Persians from former Roman territories, but is most obvious in a particular event: the emperor’s personal restoration to Jerusalem of the True Cross, captured during the Persian assault of 614. The Heraclian court orchestrated and publicized the event for maximum ideological impact, proclaiming Herakleios as the restorer of the Constantinian empire and investing his exploits with eschatological overtones.³⁶ From this perspective, the forced baptism of Jews – which had both Constantinian and eschatological resonances – appears as a further act in a cosmic drama scripted at the court.³⁷ Maximos, nevertheless, again inverted imperial rhetoric. In his letter to Sophronios, he reported his consternation at the pollution of the sacrament of baptism through its extension to unbelievers, and at the subsequent consequences

³² Maximos, *Letter 24* (PG 91:608C–609A). ³³ Maximos, *Letter 10* (PG 91:449A–453A).

³⁴ Maximos, *Letter 8*, with Devreesse 1937. Forced baptism: Booth 2013: 170 n. 131.

³⁵ Stoyanov 2011. ³⁶ Drijvers 2002. ³⁷ For those resonances, see Booth 2013: 170 and n. 132.

of apostates mingling with the faithful. This, Maximos states, would be a “clear and unambiguous sign of the consummation of the universe.”³⁸ Herakleios’ action was not the mark of a new Constantine but the mark of the Antichrist.

It is worth reflecting on the intellectual position expressed in this letter, that is, the rejection of an imperial religious initiative on the basis of the perceived pollution of the sacraments and, thence, of the Orthodox Church. For this sense of the sacramental integrity of the church and its resistance to external pollutants underlies much of his subsequent perspective on imperial religious maneuvers. Indeed, in the same period the same notion was expressed in Maximos’ liturgical masterpiece, the *Mystagogy*, an extensive interpretation of the Eucharistic rite. There Maximos propounds a profound new vision which saw symbolized in the progression of the liturgical drama the movement of man and cosmos toward their final consummation in God, and which relativized the realization of that movement according to the individual spiritual states of the gathered Christian faithful.³⁹ From an intellectual perspective, Maximos’ commentary represents the unprecedented integration of two monolithic currents of Christian thought, the ascetical and the liturgical. But in its construction of the Eucharist as the gravitational center of Christian existence, and in its studied refusal to divide the congregation into separate social categories, it also makes a confident declaration of a diverse church united in, and oriented around, ascetic endeavor and liturgical devotion. From here, it was but a small leap to the position prefigured in the letter to Sophronios: the suspicion of the potential pollution accrued through the extension of the sacrament to apostates, and the concomitant rejection of political initiatives that threatened to introduce that same pollution.

REFINING A DEBATE

It is probable that Maximos, when he issued his dramatic admonitions over the eschatological consequences of misappropriating imperial power, was conscious of Herakleios’ simultaneous doctrinal maneuvers. From 629, the emperor and his allies had launched a series of diplomatic initiatives which sought to restore communion between Constantinople and the anti-Chalcedonian churches in the eastern provinces that were then being reintegrated. Although each of those initiatives encountered mixed acceptance and resistance in anti-Chalcedonian communities, for a fleeting moment Herakleios achieved what had so often eluded his predecessors: the establishment of a doctrinal union which embraced communities from Rome to

³⁸ Devreesse 1937: 35.

³⁹ Riou 1973: 123–200; Thunberg 1985: 113–129; Larchet 1996: 399–436; Cooper 2005: 165–205.

Ctesiphon.⁴⁰ The realization of that union must in part reflect the considerable capital that Herakleios had accrued in his dramatic defeat of the Persian empire. But it perhaps also suggests that foreign occupation had led some Christians to share the imperial perspective, that is, the belief that Christian union was a greater good than an inflexible stance over doctrine.

A central component of some if not all these unionist agreements was monenergism, that is, the doctrine of the single Christological operation. Since Chalcedon, miaphysite enemies of the Council suspected that the Tome of Leo had in fact divided Christ through recognizing in him two active subjects and thus two Sons,⁴¹ and in response to such concerns so-called Neo-Chalcedonian theologians had on occasion contemplated a single “theandric” (divine–human) operation, that is, a unified operation of the divine–human Christ performing both divine and human actions.⁴² Imperial support for the doctrine under Herakleios, therefore, was not a doctrinal “innovation,” a capitulation to anti-Chalcedonian doctrine in the name of political expedience. It was the sponsorship of a position which had roots in Neo-Chalcedonian attempts to propitiate and reconcile the council’s enemies.

From the outset, it appears that Herakleios’ efforts caused considerable disquiet amongst certain Chalcedonians, in particular amidst the monasteries of Palestine.⁴³ But it was not until 633, when the Chalcedonian patriarch-to-be of Alexandria entered into communion with elements in the Egyptian Severan Church, that public opposition began.⁴⁴ Now returned from North Africa to Alexandria, Maximos’ master Sophronios protested at the terms of the union – in particular, it seems, the phrase “one theandric operation” – and appealed to Sergios, the patriarch of Constantinople, to intervene.⁴⁵ Sergios issued the *Psephos*, a document that banned discussion of Christological operations altogether, instead asserting that the actions which the single Christ performed were both divine and human at the same time.⁴⁶

Maximos’ first pronouncement on the operations is contained in his *Letter* 19, composed in the immediate aftermath of the *Psephos* and dispatched to Sergios’ disciple – and future patriarch of Constantinople – Pyrrhos. Maximos there lavishes praise on Sergios and the *Psephos*, and sets forth a theological position which complements that document’s emphasis on both the single acting subject in Christ and the status of all Christ’s

⁴⁰ For the unions, see Jankowiak 2009: 49–96; Booth 2013: 200–208. ⁴¹ Hovorun 2008: 15–41.

⁴² Uthemann 1997; Lange 2012.

⁴³ Disquiet: Euboulos of Lystra, *Against the libellus of Athanasios to the Emperor Herakleios*. In Palestine: Antiochos Monachos, *Pandects* 130 (PG 89:1843BC).

⁴⁴ See esp. the *Pact of Union*, with Jankowiak 2009: 84–96; Booth 2013: 205–208.

⁴⁵ See the account in Sergios of Constantinople, *First Letter to Honorius* 534–546.

⁴⁶ For the text of the *Psephos*, see Sergios, *First Letter to Honorius* 542–544.

actions as both divine and human. At the same time, however, he demonstrates disquiet over the monenergist doctrine earlier propounded in the Alexandrian union of 633 (which he calls an “innovation”) and requests that his correspondent differentiate various words associated with “operation,” since he cannot understand the reasons for supporting “one operation.”⁴⁷ While their masters agreed to an accord, therefore, Maximos and Pyrrhos continued the discussion and looked to define its basic terms.

From a later perspective, it is striking that Maximos here does not commit to the outright proclamation of “two operations.” Indeed, in his earliest pronouncements on the operations he continues to echo the position of the *Psephos*,⁴⁸ and one can thence trace a gradual shift toward a more assertive, anti-monenergist position,⁴⁹ in particular from around 640/1.⁵⁰ As Maximos developed his position, he was forced to confront those patristic passages that had spoken of “one operation,” and over time his approach to such passages altered. In some texts of the earlier 640s, confronted with a citation from Cyril of Alexandria which pronounced “one *sungenes* operation,” he could contemplate the qualified use of “one” as a guard against division;⁵¹ but later – when Constantinople adopted the proclamation of “one and two” operations (and wills) as its official position – he refused the same approach altogether, and is said to have dismissed the said passage as a miaphysite forgery.⁵² Indeed later in his life Maximos would come to regret some of his earlier statements on the topic of the operations, where he had not been as explicit or robust as he later would have liked.⁵³ But these developments point toward two conclusions: first, Maximos’ position developed and was refined over time, in conversation with his opponents; and, second, he was making cautious inroads into uncharted territories.

Just as Constantinopolitan support for monenergism cannot be considered a simple political “innovation,” nor can the protests of Maximos be considered a simple defense of “orthodox” tradition. Although he

⁴⁷ Maximos, *Letter 19* (PG 91:593B–596B).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 14 (PG 91:537A) (c. 633); 15 (PG 91:573B) (c. 633).

⁴⁹ Maximos, *Ambigua to Thomas 5*, does not commit to “two operations” but makes repeated and explicit references to Christ’s natural operations, and also contradicts “one operation” (5.249–250).

⁵⁰ See Maximos, *Opusculum 6* (PG 91:65A–68D, with explicit reference to “two operations” at 68A); *Opusculum 7* (PG 91:69B–89B). Both texts date to c. 640/1. The silence in the intervening period is perhaps explained by the silencing of Maximos at the Council of Cyprus in 636: see below.

⁵¹ Maximos, *Opusculum 7* (PG 91:88B–89D). Cf. *Opusculum 8* (PG 91:105C–109B); *Opusculum 9* (PG 91:124C–125C).

⁵² For his shifting position, see Bathrellos 2004: 195–201. For the dismissal of the passage from Cyril, see *Dispute at Bizya* 299–301. I owe this point to Marek Jankowiak.

⁵³ Maximos apologizes for *Letter 19* and also, it seems, *Opusculum 7* (on the simultaneous recognition of “one” and “two” operations): at *Opusculum 9* (PG 91:129A–132C); for the phrase “one operation of God and the saints” see *Ambigua to John 3* at *Opusculum 1* (PG 91:33A–B).

elaborated existing principles, and presented his position as the articulation of established patristic position, he was in fact engaged in something more significant: a pioneering analysis that confronted a protracted exegetical and Christological problem and served to problematize and sharpen the language of “operation” and its various cognates in Greek theological circles. The conservative rhetoric in which contemporaries engaged therefore disguises a substantial new discussion on the semantics of “operation” and its application to Christ.

Although protagonists in that discussion took nuanced stances – Sophronios’ as patriarch of Jerusalem (634–c. 639), for example, was distinct from that of Maximos in the same period⁵⁴ – recent literature has emphasized the remarkable closeness of the protagonists: all were committed to the Chalcedonian doctrine of two natures; all believed in a single acting Christ; and all thought in terms of Christ’s theandric acts.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the fine distinctions are crucial, if not in substance then at least in principle. Confronted with the protests of Sophronios and then Maximos, the proponents of monenergism (and later monotheletism) argued that the doctrine should be accepted on the grounds of accommodation (*oikonomia*), that is, a degree of doctrinal latitude for the sake of establishing communion. Sophronios and Maximos, in contrast, presented themselves as the proponents of *akribeia*, that is, doctrinal precision, and regarded the unions – all of which involved shared communion – as the gratuitous pollution of both “proper” Chalcedonian doctrine and the Chalcedonian Church itself.⁵⁶ Contained within the Christological conflict, therefore, we also witness a deeper ecclesiological (and sacramental) conflict: between those who were willing to negotiate on doctrine and to tolerate difference for the sake of communion, and those for whom proper doctrine could not be compromised without the taint of pollution.

CONSTRUCTING A DEBATE

In order to appreciate fully Maximos’ ever-deepening dissent from Constantinople, it is crucial not to lose sight of its geopolitical context. For at the precise moment that he and Sophronios launched their public opposition to monenergist doctrine, the Muslims had begun to infringe upon Roman territories.⁵⁷ Constantinopolitan claims to temporal and cosmological renewal – toward which Maximos had demonstrated an evident reticence – were unraveling; and therein too, for Maximos perhaps, were realized his portentous earlier warnings concerning the eschatological

⁵⁴ Sophronios, *Synodical Letter*, with Bathrellos 2004: 179–185. ⁵⁵ Price 2010; 2014: 87–90.

⁵⁶ Ohme 2008. ⁵⁷ Howard-Johnston 2010: 464–470.

consequences of submitting unbelievers to the sacraments and allowing them to mix with the faithful.

We should not underestimate the sense of shock which the expansion of the emergent caliphate engendered. In a letter composed soon after the commencement of the conquests, Maximos asked a correspondent (perhaps, again, an imperial official) what could be more terrible than the troubles of the *oikoumene*, in which “a barbarous, desert people” had overrun the civilized world. Maximos, once again, regarded the turbulent times as an indication of the Antichrist’s imminent reign, and pointed to collective Christian sin as its cause.⁵⁸ Although he refrained here and elsewhere from making a direct (and impolitic) association between imperial doctrine and the crisis of empire, there can be little doubt of the association between heretical doctrine and temporal disaster in his mind.

Maximos may have experienced the Muslims at close quarters, for late in 634, as the Arab armies overran Palestine, Sophronios was elected patriarch of Jerusalem and Maximos appears then, if not before, to have been reunited with his master.⁵⁹ From an embattled Jerusalem, and despite Sergios’ *Psephos*, Sophronios continued to oppose monenergism, and in 636 – on the eve of the effective collapse of Roman resistance in the Near East, and thence Jerusalem’s capitulation – a council was convened on Cyprus with representatives of all four active Chalcedonian patriarchates. Here, according to the *Syriac Life* of Maximos, the assembled bishops disagreed over the doctrine of Sophronios and Maximos, and when a letter of the latter was submitted to Herakleios for arbitration, the emperor issued an “edict” which condemned it.⁶⁰ Recent literature has identified that “edict” as the (in)famous *Ekthesis*, a document which again banned discussion of Christological operations, and reasserted the doctrine of the *Psephos*.⁶¹

The publication of the *Ekthesis* in or soon after 636 seems to have effectively imposed a moratorium on the debate over operations. But within the same document were contained the seeds of a new controversy. The earlier *Psephos*, it seems, had included a statement to the effect that Christ could not have two opposed wills,⁶² and in 635 pope Honorius had written to Sergios approving the sentiment, but inferred that Christ had “one will,” a profession then included in the *Ekthesis*.⁶³ Later polemic has often led modern commentators to consider the *Ekthesis* a “monothelete” edict and to suppose that it too was designed to appeal to anti-

⁵⁸ Maximos, *Letter 14* (PG 91:540A–541B, Antichrist at 540B). For the date (c. 633) and the correspondent (Peter the Illustrios), see Jankowiak and Booth 2015.

⁵⁹ This return, as presaged in the conclusion to *Letter 8*, is required by George of Resh’aina, *Syriac Life* 8–17.

⁶⁰ George of Resh’aina, *Syriac Life* 10–16. ⁶¹ Jankowiak 2009: 150–162.

⁶² Sergios, *First Letter to Honorius* 542–544, with Booth 2013: 240 n. 58.

⁶³ Honorius, *First Letter to Sergios* 548–558; *Acts of the Lateran Council* 158–160.

Chalcedonian communities in the (now occupied) eastern provinces. This, however, is not the document's purpose or context: its actual aim was to suppress discussion on the operations, and its context was not a continued appeal to eastern dissenters from Chalcedon – for whom the abrogation of monenergism would have been unacceptable – but rather the reestablishment of Chalcedonian consensus in the aftermath of Sophronios' and Maximos' protests. It is far from clear, furthermore, that contemporaries would have considered the “one will” formula controversial.⁶⁴

From around 640, however, Maximos began to agitate against the monothelete doctrine of the *Ektthesis*, and here made a significant departure from previous discussions of Christ's will (or wills).⁶⁵ Unlike the question of the Christological operation(s), earlier debate on the will(s) had been limited, as demonstrated in the desperate, and largely unsuccessful, seventh-century attempts to scour the tradition for patristic support.⁶⁶ Such debate had for the most part focused on the Agony at Gethsemane, where Christ seemed to demonstrate a contradiction of wills: first recoiling from death, but then proclaiming that the Father's will be done over his (cf. Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Guarding against a subordinationist interpretation, the Cappadocians and others had treated Christ's initial reluctance as the natural refusal of the human will to welcome death, while the subsequent submission demonstrated the preeminence within him of the divine will, common to Father and Son. If that reluctance revealed a certain failing in Christ's manhood, this was because Christ had – as with other human experiences – appropriated it to himself.⁶⁷ Maximos, however, made a seminal departure from this tradition, interpreting the initial recoil as an impulse of the flesh, while the human will, being in perfect accord with the divine, freely accepted the passion. Elsewhere he explained this further in differentiating the gnostic and the natural human will, the former being the deliberation to which postlapsarian humans are subjected, and the latter that which Christ possesses and to which man must aspire: that is, the free but inevitable choice to follow the divine will.⁶⁸

As in the earlier debate on operations, therefore, the conflict was not a simple defense of “orthodox” Chalcedonian doctrine in the face of an imperial attempt to corrupt it for political purposes. On the one side,

⁶⁴ Price 2014: 196–198.

⁶⁵ Maximos' earliest pronouncements on the wills are *Opusculum* 4 (*PG* 91:56D–61D; dated c. 636–640); *Opusculum* 6 (65A–68D; c. 640–641, as are the following texts); *Opusculum* 7 (69B–89B); *Opusculum* 8 (89C–112B); and *Opusculum* 20 (228B–245D). For the dates, see Jankowiak and Booth 2015; for analysis, see Jankowiak 2013.

⁶⁶ See esp. the lack of post-Chalcedonian citations on the will in the *Acts of the Lateran Council*. The monotheletes fared little better: Brock 1985.

⁶⁷ Price 2014: 92–94.

⁶⁸ See esp. *Opusculum* 16 (*PG* 91:184C–212A). For Maximos on the will, see Bausenhart 1992; Larchet 1996: 221–382; Bathrellos 2004: 99–174.

Maximos developed his commitment to “two wills” over time, drawing from existing principles but also correcting some earlier ambiguities;⁶⁹ while, on the other, the Constantinopolitans made repeated efforts to reestablish communion with Maximos and his allies, soon retreating from support of the *Ekthesis*,⁷⁰ then defending the “one will” formula as meaning that Christ’s flesh (with its rational soul) “possessed the divine will,”⁷¹ and finally abrogating discussion on the wills altogether.⁷² These pacific maneuvers did nothing to convince Maximos of Constantinople’s commitment to proper doctrine. But his anti-monothelite polemic should, once again, not obscure what was in fact occurring: a substantial new dialogue on the Christological wills in which both sides were making significant advances on the patristic and philosophical inheritance.⁷³

POPE AND EMPERORS

Context was again important. Maximos’ resistance to the *Ekthesis* – and, with it, his assertion of “two” operations and wills – was not immediate. From 640, however, two developments encouraged the renewal of the public doctrinal resistance: first, the Muslims commenced the conquest of Egypt, once again underlining Roman weakness and exposing North Africa to further expansion; and, second, after the death of Honorius the Roman popes performed a doctrinal *volte face*, throwing their weight behind the anti-monothelite resistance.⁷⁴ A combination of continued imperial reversals, tensions with the exarch at Ravenna, and diplomatic pressure applied through Maximos and his circle had no doubt convinced the Romans that a direct relation existed between Constantinopolitan doctrine and the temporal disasters of the *oikoumene*.⁷⁵

Perhaps around the time of Sophronios’ death in c. 639, Maximos had retreated again to North Africa and begun to develop his aforementioned commitment to “two” operations and wills in Christ. His output from this period, however, is also notable for another feature, that is, its defense and

⁶⁹ For the prefiguring of “two wills,” see Maximos, *Exposition on the Lord’s Prayer* 135–139, 148–153, 159–164; with Berthold 2011. But see the early application to Christ of *proairesis* and *gnome* at Maximos, *Exposition on the Lord’s Prayer* 34; *Questions to Thalassios* 42, with the retraction in *Opuscula* 1 (*PG* 91:29D–31A).

⁷⁰ For this position of Constans II and the patriarch Paul (c. 641–642), see Booth 2013: 281–282.

⁷¹ See Paul’s *Letter to Pope Theodore* (645) at *Acts of the Lateran Council* 196–205, with Price 2014: 96.

⁷² In the *Typos* (647/8). For the text: *Acts of the Lateran Council* 206–208. For context, see Booth 2013: 291–293.

⁷³ Cf. Sorabji 2003.

⁷⁴ See esp. pope John, *Letter in Defence of Honorius*; see Jankowiak 2009: 183–191; Booth 2013: 259–269.

⁷⁵ Tensions with the exarch: *Book of Pontiffs* 73 (pp. 328 ff.). Palestinian diplomatic pressure: Maximos, *Opuscula* 20 (*PG* 91:244C–D); *Acts of the Lateran Council* 40–42.

celebration of the Roman popes, now his allies. Thus in *Opusculum* 20 (c. 641) he mounted a (desperate) defense of the now deceased Honorius' orthodox credentials;⁷⁶ and, soon after, in his *Opusculum* 10 (c. 643), he defended against eastern detractors the synodical letter of pope Theodore, which had asserted both the *filioque* and the freedom of Christ from original sin.⁷⁷ At the same time, we discover in contemporaneous texts by Maximos effusive statements in support of Roman ecclesial and doctrinal preeminence, in particular the *Letter A (to Thalassios)* (c. 640) and *Opusculum* 12 (c. 645).⁷⁸ This rhetoric of course complements the long-standing claims of the popes. But it also reflects Maximos' evident realization that the maintenance of his doctrinal position depended on Roman support, and that he had much to gain in emphasizing Rome's continuous commitment to orthodoxy.⁷⁹

Throughout the 640s the agenda of Maximos and his circle became ever more entwined with that of the popes. In 645 he had confronted and defeated the deposed Constantinopolitan patriarch and monothelite Pyrrhos in a doctrinal disputation at Carthage,⁸⁰ and soon after he had traveled to Rome.⁸¹ There, the anti-monothelite resistance entered a more assertive phase. Around 647/8, pope Theodore appointed a former disciple of Sophronios, Stephen of Dora, as papal *vicarius* in the east, charged with the deposition of monothelite bishops;⁸² and soon after Theodore began preparations for a pan-Italian council to condemn monothelite doctrine.⁸³ Although Theodore would not live to see his plans realized, the Lateran Council convened under his successor Martin, in October 649, and condemned the proponents of both monenergism and monothelism. Soon after, Maximos – who was instrumental in preparing the council's *Acts* and florilegia⁸⁴ – was proclaiming it the Sixth Ecumenical Council.⁸⁵ It was a striking affront to imperial power.

The anti-monothelite resistance now risked spilling over into open political rebellion. Even before the Lateran Council – in the wake of two North African councils condemning monothelism (645/6)⁸⁶ – the North African exarch Gregory, who had previously presided over Maximos'

⁷⁶ Maximos, *Opusculum* 20 (PG 91:237C–245A), with Larchet 1998: 128–133; Jankowiak 2013.

⁷⁷ Maximos, *Opusculum* 10 (PG 91:133A–137C).

⁷⁸ See *Letter A (to Thalassios)* (PL 129:585A, 586A); *Opusculum* 12 (PG 91:144B–C). For its authenticity, see Booth 2013: 272–274.

⁷⁹ See esp. Larchet 1998.

⁸⁰ See *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, of which Maximos is perhaps the author.

⁸¹ Maximos in Rome: *Disputation with Pyrrhos* (PG 91:353A); also George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 19; *Record of the Trial* 53–62.

⁸² See esp. *Acts of the Lateran Council* 46, with Booth 2013: 295–297.

⁸³ The Lateran Council met in October 649 (*Acts of the Lateran Council* 2), and, even though Theodore had died in May (*Book of Pontiffs* 75), preparations must have begun under his pontificate.

⁸⁴ See the articles in Riedinger 1998, with Price 2014: 59–68.

⁸⁵ *Opusculum* 11 (PG 91:137C–140B).

⁸⁶ *Acts of the Lateran Council* 66–103, with Jankowiak 2009: 220–227.

disputation with Pyrrhos in Carthage, seceded from Constantinopolitan rule,⁸⁷ perhaps with the active encouragement of Maximos and pope Theodore.⁸⁸ But now the same pattern was repeated at Rome. Soon after the Lateran Council the Italian exarch dispatched to arrest the council's protagonists also rebelled, and reached an accord with pope Martin.⁸⁹ It seems that he, like Gregory before him, was soon defeated at the hands of Muslim invaders, but in Constantinople the implication must have been unambiguous – where Maximos went, doctrinal dissent and political rebellion soon followed.

In 653, when peace with the caliphate granted the emperor the political space to act against internal opponents, a new exarch arrested Martin and Maximos in Rome.⁹⁰ Martin was soon transported to the capital and there condemned to exile.⁹¹ But Maximos' trial did not convene until 655.⁹² In the context of that trial and of subsequent attempts to convert him to the imperial cause, Maximos and his circle produced several substantial texts (especially the dialogic *Record of the Trial* and *Dispute at Bizya*) which do much to elucidate the respective intellectual positions.⁹³ In addition to the disagreement over the use of “one will” – which the monotheletes now defended not as an exclusion of “two wills” but as a simultaneous guard against division in Christ⁹⁴ – Maximos therein denounces both his opponents' doctrine and their attempts to defend their position by appealing to the concepts of doctrinal accommodation (*oikonomia*) and of silence for the sake of peace.⁹⁵ Maximos and his circle, therefore, were not the tragic victims of an imperial attempt to enforce a malign Christian “monodoxie,”⁹⁶ but the precise inverse: implacable enemies of irenic imperial maneuvers which placed universal communion above absolute precision in doctrine (or *akribeia*).⁹⁷

Although this position was rooted in Maximos' resistance to monenergism and monotheletism, within the trial literature it assumes a more overt political dimension. In the *Record of the Trial*, Maximos is accused of political crimes: discouraging the *strategos* of Numidia from coming to the aid of Herakleios' regime; encouraging the rebellion of the North African exarch; and ridiculing the emperor (some or all of which was perhaps true).⁹⁸ But then a further witness alleges that while in Rome Maximos' disciple Anastasios had denied the emperor's sacerdotal status, which prompts

⁸⁷ Jankowiak 2009: 228–231; Booth 2013: 288–289. ⁸⁸ As alleged in the *Record of the Trial* 53–62.

⁸⁹ *Book of Pontiffs* 76. Cf. also Theodore Spoudaios, *Narrations concerning the Exile of the Holy Pope Martin* 6, 16–17.

⁹⁰ *Book of Pontiffs* 76. Cf. Theodore Spoudaios, *Narrations* 5–9, 12–13. For the context and Maximos' simultaneous arrest, see Booth 2013: 301, 306.

⁹¹ Brandes 1998: 159–177; Booth 2013: 301–305. ⁹² For the date, see Allen and Neil 2002: 35.

⁹³ Brandes 1998; Allen and Neil 2002; Neil 2006. The dossier perhaps includes the *Disputation with Pyrrhos*; see Noret 1999.

⁹⁴ See esp. *Dispute at Bizya*. ⁹⁵ *Record of the Trial* 141–179; *Dispute at Bizya* 167–192.

⁹⁶ Cf. above n. 4. ⁹⁷ Cf. above n. 56. ⁹⁸ *Record of the Trial* 23–106.

Maximos to pronounce that the emperor indeed cannot be a priest because he does not preside at the altar, make ordinations, or bear the vestments of priesthood; in the Eucharistic rite, the emperor is commemorated after the entire clerical order, and is therefore a layman, with no right to debate dogma.⁹⁹ Although it is doubtful that Herakleios or Constans II explicitly proclaimed himself “emperor and priest,” since Constantine imperial power had nevertheless been constructed on the implicit model of the Christian emperor as “quasi-priest.”¹⁰⁰ Although that model was fraught with ambiguities, Maximos in the *Record of the Trial* sought to expose its basic faults, thereby offering an unprecedented challenge to the political culture of the Constantinopolitan court. The earlier concern of Maximos to protect the Church and its sacraments from heretical pollution was extended here to include its freedom from secular interference.¹⁰¹

Within the monenergist and monothelete crises, therefore, we witness the gradual confrontation not only of two Christologies (even if, in truth, the positions were not that distinct), but also of two doctrinal and political ideologies: the one emphasizing *oikonomia* and obedience to imperial will, the other *akribeia* and the exclusion of the emperor from religious narratives. Both of these positions, we should note, were formed within the context of Persian and then Islamic expansion: for Constantinople, the most pressing imperative was the communion of all Christians and the maintenance of imperial prestige in the face of a fundamental challenge to the empire and its faith. But for Maximos and his circle it was the restoration of divine favour through the preservation of proper doctrine, irrespective of imperial will. Of course, if the emperor Constans had capitulated to Maximos’ position, we might have expected a significant alteration in the latter’s rhetoric. But as the crisis of the Roman empire deepened, and as the imperial commitment to monadic or equivocal doctrinal expressions became ever more entrenched – and, with it, the perceived relation of temporal disaster and improper doctrine – so too did opposition deepen, culminating in a fundamental challenge to imperial religious power, a challenge which established a powerful blueprint for Christian political dissent in subsequent centuries, when the emperor at Constantinople risked exclusion from religious narratives and could be cast not as the Church’s protector, but rather as its persecutor.

It is perhaps surprising that the emperor did not at once execute Maximos, instead exiling him and then making repeated efforts to ensure his submission – including, from 657, the official recognition of “one and two” operations and

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 112–206; cf. *Dispute at Bizya* 234–255. ¹⁰⁰ Dagron 1996. ¹⁰¹ Booth 2013: 310–313.

wills.¹⁰² But that reluctance reflects both the continued unwillingness of Constantinople to exacerbate religious tensions,¹⁰³ and the political capital which the court no doubt expected to gain from Maximos' capitulation.¹⁰⁴ From the Constantinopolitan perspective, Maximos represented a threat far greater than that of the ascetic champions of previous centuries. For besides his status as the figurehead of the doctrinal resistance, he had formed a doctrinal alliance with the popes, and in his reported differentiation of the "two powers," secular and sacred, and his subsequent denunciation of imperial interference in matters of the faith, had started to echo the rhetoric of Rome.¹⁰⁵ As Roman power faltered and as Constantinople's doctrinal position continued to shift in a desperate bid to realize communion, so too did some Chalcedonian intellectuals begin to invest in patterns of thought which predicted a post-Roman world, a world in which the Church was once again divested, unsullied, of an empire.

CONCLUSION

Maximos died in exile in Lazica on 13 August 662. Although he ended his life in isolation – even Rome had then abandoned him – he is perhaps the most important intellectual of seventh-century Byzantium.¹⁰⁶ Critics have sometimes thought of this period as witnessing the realization of a "totalizing discourse" that suppressed pluralism, drained the secular, and left little room for dissent.¹⁰⁷ But one will struggle to reconcile Maximos' output to such a vision. Although his intellectual achievement was in part to bring together the divergent strands of previous Chalcedonian thought, he is neither a sterile encyclopedist nor a meek servant of a singular and monolithic "orthodox culture." Besides his importance to subsequent Chalcedonian thought – his doctrines of "two operations" and "two wills" were recognized as orthodox at Constantinople within two decades of his death – Maximos represents both the sustained intellectual inventiveness of the period and the continued willingness of Christians to subvert and confront the religious culture of the Constantinopolitan court. The challenge is now to unveil further that same creativity, pluralism, and dissidence in subsequent centuries of Byzantine Christian thought.

¹⁰² See the reported attempts documented in the *Dispute at Bizya*, with Booth 2013: 313–317. On the change of position to "one and two," see Maximos, *Letter to Anastasius the Disciple* and Anastasios the Disciple, *Letter to the Monks of Cagliari*.

¹⁰³ This is explicit at *Dispute at Bizya* 114.

¹⁰⁴ See the reported offer made to Maximos of receiving communion alongside the emperor in Hagia Sophia at *Dispute at Bizya* 108, with Jankowiak 2009: 324.

¹⁰⁵ Booth 2013: 340–341. ¹⁰⁶ For the end of Maximos' life, see Jankowiak 2009: 318–361.

¹⁰⁷ Cameron 1994. Her position is now different but continues to inspire others, e.g. Bell 2013.

CHAPTER 25

JOHN OF DAMASCUS' PHILOSOPHY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE THEOLOGY OF ICONS

ANNA ZHYRKOVA

During the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantine empire underwent dramatic political and socioeconomic changes. Previously the dominant political entity, it suffered a tremendous loss of territory and political power. While under threat from the caliphate and the Bulgar khanate, it failed to retain political and spiritual connections to Rome, and its economic and administrative systems experienced numerous transformations. Even as it faced the external menace of Islam, internally it was coping with the sociopolitical consequences of the Christological controversies. However, rather than treating this period as analogous to the western Dark Ages, we might consider it an age of *redefinition* – one which helped shape the new cultural reality of Byzantine Orthodoxy. In the larger context of those changes, the Iconoclastic controversy may count as just one of numerous problems marking the empire's transformation.¹ Still, the controversy was of immense theological importance, resulting in the establishment of a systematic theology of icons and even, one might say, of Orthodoxy as such. As Robin Cormack has pointed out, only after Iconoclasm did icons become a symbol and sign of Orthodoxy and the distinguishing feature of the eastern Church's doctrine.²

The core tenets of the theology of icons were delivered in the works of John of Damascus. The significance of his work on this subject for the eastern tradition cannot be exaggerated, but a careful reader of his theological treatises will discover that his theological conceptions are grounded in novel philosophical insights into the questions of the individual and individuality. While this part of his work is frequently ignored by scholars, it was widely recognized by leading medieval philosophers in the west.

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¹ The traditional view, as represented by George Florovsky (1950: 77) and Gerhart Ladner (1940: 127), holds the Iconoclastic controversy to be one of the major conflicts in the history of the entire Christian Church, and crucial for Byzantine history. Such evaluations of the importance of Iconoclasm, especially of its early stage, were mostly based on late and biased evidence, frequently contaminated by interpolations. More recent studies ascribe to Iconoclasm a much more modest role: Whittow 1996; Haldon 1997; Dagron 1993: 93; Cameron 1979: 3; Brown 1973: 3; Noble 2009: 47–48.

² Cormack 1997: 20, 46.

When discussing individuality and individuation – one of the most important issues of medieval philosophy – Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, and others named John of Damascus in the same breath as such undisputed authorities as Porphyry and Avicenna.³ Thus, even if our focus is on his theology of icons, this element of John's thought should not be neglected. For instead of concentrating on the obscure question of the nature of images, John proposes an ontological justification for icons: that they themselves are consequences of the essential unity of divinity and humanity in one unique individual – the Incarnate Logos.

ICONOCLASM: ITS HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

The roots of the Iconoclastic controversy had emerged long before John came on the scene. The cult of icons, which now seems natural to and inseparable from the Orthodox faith itself and the numerous cultures it shaped, went through a long, difficult process of growth and rejection before obtaining doctrinal justification and becoming an inextricable part of Orthodoxy. Both the controversy itself and the reasons for it continue to puzzle historians, even after extensive study. Facile accounts attribute it to the influence of foreign ideas, such as Jewish and Muslim attitudes toward images, "Caesaropapism," the Christological controversies, the tradition of cultic veneration of images, social differences between the oriental population and traditional urban culture, and so on. These do not withstand critique based on the available evidence.⁴ We can say with certainty only that Iconoclasm was a complex phenomenon, whose proper understanding still eludes us.

The emperor Leo III (717–741) supposedly initiated the first phase of Iconoclasm in the mid-720s, though the exact nature of his policy remains controversial and is hard to extract from iconophile polemic. As an official policy, it was reversed by the empress-regnant Eirene (780–797), who summoned the Ecumenical Council of 787 at Nicaea, reestablishing the traditional status of religious imagery and proclaiming the veneration of icons as an article of faith. The second phase of Iconoclasm was shorter: in 815, Leo V (813–820) reembraced it, but in 842 the Synod of Constantinople convoked by the empress-regent Theodora restored the cult of holy icons, and this was commemorated later as the Feast of Orthodoxy and the final defeat of Iconoclasm.⁵ If one reflects on the Iconoclastic controversy, relating it to the otherwise consistently ongoing iconophile tradition of the eastern Church, Iconoclasm seems to be no

³ See n. 53 below. ⁴ Brown 1973; Grabar 1977; Grunebaum 1962; Vasiliev 1956.

⁵ This was known as the Feast of Orthodoxy, or Sunday of Orthodoxy, as the restoration of icons took place on 19 February – the First Sunday of Lent in that year.

more than a passing hiatus. Yet it led to the crystallization of Orthodox theology and the self-identification of the eastern Church itself.

The theological arguments used by both sides early on in the controversy are not directly known to us.⁶ Possible lines of argumentation might be deduced from the letters of the prominent defender of icons and witness of the outburst of the controversy, Germanos, patriarch of Constantinople. In his writings one can find the centuries-old accusation of breaching Mosaic Law through worshiping artifacts, together with the Old Testament prohibition against images and arguments based on the impossibility of depicting invisible and spiritual realities such as the Godhead. Germanos' defense was already essentially familiar, too. He denies that Christians ever worshiped created things: true worship is reserved for God alone. He also denies that there can be images of an invisible God, and stresses that images of Christ and the saints are meant to encourage people to follow them and praise God. His defense is based on the fact that Christ, like the Virgin and the other saints, can be pictured "in terms of the flesh." The patriarch also points out that one should not accept the arguments directed against images by Jews and Muslims, who aim to destroy the Church. Icons belong to the ecclesiastical tradition and have never in fact been condemned by the Church.⁷

Thus, when shortly after 730 John of Damascus came to the defense of icons, the question of images was not considered a Christological problem and there was no theology of icons *sensu stricto*. John saw that giving up icons was no small thing and would have immense theological consequences.⁸ It was John who turned the discussion of whether the use and veneration of religious imagery was in accordance with the Bible and Church tradition into a doctrinal issue of Christological and soteriological essence.⁹ And it was John who built the foundations of the theology of icons as we know it today. We concentrate here only on its main points – those which were theologically revolutionary and which also stem from John's own innovative philosophical premises and conceptions.

First, we should mention a line of philosophical argumentation in support of the worship of religious images that originated well before the outbreak of Iconoclasm, in the work of the great advocate of pagan cults and their art, Plotinus. In his treatise *On Intelligible Beauty*, he stated that

⁶ As pointed out by Florovsky 1950: 80, we know and understand the position of the Iconodules much better than the theology of the Iconoclasts. Most Iconoclastic writings were destroyed and can be reconstructed only by accepting hostile testimony.

⁷ On the early arguments with which Germanos and others engaged, see Baynes 1951; Kitzinger 1954; Ladner 1953: 1–16.

⁸ John of Damascus, *Apologia* 1.2.16–22.

⁹ Scholars who consider the Iconoclastic controversy a result of Christological quarrels, for instance Henry 1976, seem to perceive the problem through the lens of the Damascene's impact and legacy. See Noble 1987: 95.

an artist participates in art by virtue of his intellection. Yet it is not the artist but the art that creates beautiful objects, by imposing on material substrates the forms in his mind thanks to his participation in that art. Material objects shaped by those imposed forms will resemble their paradigms because they reflect them, as a kind of mirror. Their similarity, however, is never an actual identity of form. A material object does not in itself possess – even to a limited extent – an identical form to the paradigm. It is only the reflection of the form that connects an object to its paradigm. In other words, art is a kind of ontological participation in intelligible reality: the artist enriches a barely formed material object by adding an element of intelligibility.¹⁰ Hence, works of religious art reflect higher realities, and since the world of Forms is considered divine, all religious images will be truly linked to their divine paradigms.¹¹

This conception of Plotinos lay behind the later treatment of religious images as a form of mediating representation. John assimilated the Neoplatonic justification for religious imagery via the works of the author who went by the name of Dionysios the Areopagite.¹² Accordingly, John defines an image as both a likeness and reflection of the pictured original, stressing that an image is different from its archetype.¹³ Every image reveals something hidden either for sensible or for intellectual perception. An icon, itself visible and possessing bodily shape, nevertheless presents invisible and formless realities. It is a medium that elevates (*anagogon*) us – who are incapable of directly apprehending intelligible realities – to a consideration of what is invisible and shapeless. The main purpose of icons is to give us knowledge (albeit limited) of what is concealed – knowledge which ultimately leads to virtue and salvation.¹⁴ John also adopted iconodule arguments from other predecessors: for instance, he accepted that worshipping images could be a way to honor the pictured original.¹⁵

Nevertheless, John realized that such argumentation is not sufficient to justify making images of the true God, who is the source of all things, has no beginning, is uncreated, immortal, everlasting, incomprehensible, invisible, non-circumscribed, formless, beyond any substantial being, and who is also one divine Godhead in the three hypostases of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He evidently regarded any such attempt as impossibly

¹⁰ Plotinos, *Enneads* 6.2.22.38–46, 4.10.1–17, also 4.3.11.1–12, 5.8.1.1–34. See Pradeau 2003: 69–70.

¹¹ Plotinos, *Enneads* 6.3.11.1–12. See Podbielski 2009. ¹² See Chapter 18.

¹³ *Apologia* 1.9.3–6, 3.16.2–8. Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 432a8–d3; Plotinos, *Enneads* 6.3.11.5–8, 4.10.1–12.

¹⁴ *Apologia* 1.11.1–26, 3.17.1–14. Cf. pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.2 (65.8–17), 5.1 (105.3–9); also Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 28.13.18–21; Germanos, *Letter* 4.241–250. On John's thought and Neoplatonism, see Ladner 1953: 8–9.

¹⁵ *Apologia* 3.41.52–56. The well-known argument is related to Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.45.15–20.

misguided. That one can draw likenesses of Christ's human form, as the Invisible One came to be visible in the flesh by becoming man for the sake of our salvation, is a claim which he thought reasonable but not sufficient to justify actually doing so.¹⁶ After all, Christ was not merely a man, so the argument only covered depictions of the human nature of the Incarnate Logos, leaving the question of representing His divinity unaddressed. John thus introduces into the discussion of religious imagery a Christology based on his own conception of hypostasis as the structuring principle of existence.

JOHN'S UNDERSTANDING OF INDIVIDUAL BEING

John's conception of hypostasis was formed in an effort to establish clear terminology, such as would allow for a proper Orthodox elucidation of the mystery of the Incarnation. In his opinion, the ambiguous usage of such key terms in Christology as "substance," "nature," and "hypostasis" engendered serious theological problems and mistakes.¹⁷ In Chalcedonian teaching both "substance" and "nature" were used as designations of the *common* content in the definition of an entity of a certain kind. Accordingly, substance and nature were understood as common accounts attributable to individually existing entities. Therefore, nature and substance were ostensibly distinguished from the hypostatic existence of real individual entities.¹⁸ But Chalcedon provided no elucidation of what individual entity, as hypostasis, amounts to. Defining philosophical notions was outside the Council's remit, and the philosophical teachings then current furnished no basis anyway. The question of individual being lay outside the interests of the ancient philosophical schools, becoming a live philosophical issue only in the Middle Ages. In the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, which had the biggest impact on patristic thought, the individual was understood not as "some thing" (*to ti*), i.e. real essence, but as "suchlike," being defined later on as a "collection of qualities."¹⁹ In other words, an individual was not considered a true being. Aristotle, in turn, while considering the primary substances, i.e. particulars, to be real beings, did not deliberate on their existence. As with Platonists, the secondary substances, i.e. the forms, genera, and species, were the main object of his consideration. John of Damascus, in wanting to solve Christological problems and, particularly, those related to the theology of icons, had no choice but to investigate the issue of individuals himself.

¹⁶ *Apologia* 1.4.27–45 = 3.6.27–45, 1.8.39–48 = 1.8.39–48, 2.5.1–10 = 3.2.1–10, 2.7.34–37 = 3.4.34–37, 3.24.13–15.

¹⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Faith* 47.39–40.

¹⁸ Louth 2002: 48, 113–15, 57; Zhyrkova 2013.

¹⁹ Plato, *Theaetetus* 157b–c; *Timaeus* 49d–50c. For "collection of qualities," see Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 4.7.8–12; Plotinos, *Enneads* 6.3.8.16–30; Porphyry, *Isagoge* 7.19–24.

Since Chalcedon, Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophical concepts had been widely applied in Christological discourse. Neoplatonic logical teaching offered John an accepted ground on which to build his conceptions. In the Neoplatonic reading of the *Categories*, substance is defined as the first and most general genus, but also as individual and concrete subject.²⁰ However, substance in the meaning of most general genus is not a genus of being but a kind of predication, i.e. a category.²¹ As a category, it is the highest element in the hierarchy of predication. This hierarchy consists in superior genera being predicated of subaltern genera and of their species, down to particular individuals. The latter are neither dividable into anything else nor predicated of anything but themselves. The subaltern genera and species emerge from the highest ones in the process of being divided by essential differences, down to the lowest species (for instance, the human species). What a species is, i.e. its “logos,” is defined by its genus together with its essential differences. Individuals belonging to a species share the same definition. Their being individuals consists in being a unique collection (*athroisma*) of characteristics.²² For John, this picture of reality is only the starting point.

In his *Philosophical Chapters*, John defines substance *as such*, and qualified substance, i.e. substance of a certain kind, or nature *vel form*,²³ as universals (*katholou*) performing the function of general predicates.²⁴ They are predicated of the individuals (hypostases) subordinated to them.²⁵ The reason for which substance of a certain kind (for instance “being a human being”) is predicated of a hypostasis is that the substance to which a certain kind of hypostasis belongs is *complete* in each of the hypostases of the same species. Specific substance or nature thus occurs in a complete and equal manner in each hypostasis of a given species. The essential differences of specific species form hypostases belonging to those species, and separate them from hypostases of other species,²⁶ with the result that hypostases of the same species do not differ in their (qualified) substance or nature.²⁷ It is clear, then, what is responsible for the nature of a hypostasis.

So far, John does not go beyond the standard Neoplatonic view of species, applied to hypostases rather than individuals. But what

²⁰ Porphyry, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 58.8–21; Ammonios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 44.8–11; cf. John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 10.136–139. Although Neoplatonists share the Aristotelian doctrine of primary and secondary substance there is a need to point out that in Aristotle's doctrine substance is either one of homonymous notions (such as being) or one of notions which relate to individuals rather than to a genus of things.

²¹ Porphyry, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 56.8–9, 58.3–6, 70.25–29.

²² Porphyry, *Isagoge*, 3–13.

²³ Also, the notion of form is defined by John as informed and qualified substance. It denotes the most specific species: *Dialectica* 42.2–7.

²⁴ *Dialectica* 15, 17 (whole chapters), 65.76–77. See also Ica 1995: 106–107.

²⁵ *Exposition* 48.2–10, 50.3–6, 55.4–7. ²⁶ *Ibid.* 43.14–19. ²⁷ *Ibid.* 50.6–11.

a hypostasis itself is, and what makes it a hypostasis, are more complicated questions, which John answers through an innovative synthesis. To understand his conception of hypostasis, two issues must be elucidated. The first is the notion of an individual, the second his conception of existence as proper to an individual entity.

According to John, "individual" (*atomon*) in its most proper sense denotes a relatively indivisible entity that loses its *prima species* (to *proton eidos*, which is identical to individual's form) when divided up.²⁸ An individual, then, is the most particular subject, which logically is incapable of further division.²⁹ Therefore, an individual of the human species cannot be divided into other humans, even though he or she can be split into organs, or into body and soul. The indivisibility of the individual also reveals its ontological unity to be a complete qualified substance of a certain kind. The essential constitutive elements of a certain individual are not divisible, because their division would bring about its destruction as a substance of a certain kind. Therefore, division of the essential components leads to a loss of the *prima species* for an individual – to loss, that is, of its very being. For instance, the loss of an organ does not destroy human nature as present in a certain individual, but the separation by death into body and soul does.

John characterizes an individual entity as distinct from other entities of the same kind. An individual must therefore possess some attribute that makes it different from other individuals of that species. Individuals cannot be differentiated by substance, because substance (in this case, "being human") determines the common essential content of individuals belonging to the same species. Therefore, John claims that an individual should consist of substance and accidents.³⁰ Accidents would thus seem to be those features by virtue of which an individual appears as different from other individuals of the same species. It is a combination of such accidents that marks off the individuality of different individual entities of the same kind. Therefore, they are perceived as numerically different entities.³¹

The roots of John's treatment of individual discernibility can be traced to Porphyry's account of an individual as a unique collection of characteristics. In the west, Boethius struggled with the same problem of individuality, as he reinterpreted the Porphyrian ontology in the context of his post-Augustinian Trinitology. Modifying the Porphyrian account, he claimed that the uniqueness of a set of accidental properties considered together constitutes the individuality of a substance.³² He also asserted that

²⁸ *Dialectica* 11.7–12. ²⁹ *Ibid.* 5.72–74, 9.40–45, 10.68–81. Cf. Porphyry, *Isagoge* 7.27–8.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 5.136–138. ³¹ *Ibid.* 38.8–11, 49.24–28.

³² Boethius, *Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* 231, 234–235 (= *PL* 64:112, 114); see Gracia 1984: 67–68, 76–78.

variation of accidents, or of place, differentiates substances numerically (i.e., as we might say, as banknotes of a given value differ one from another).³³ In contrast to Boethius, John of Damascus did not seek to shed light on the causes of individuation or numerical difference by invoking unique collections of accidental properties. Accidental features, according to John, furnish the conditions thanks to which individuals are discernible, and may be one of the constituents of numerical difference, but do not provide an actual principle of individuation. What seems to determine an individual *qua* individual is its particular existing by itself (*kath' auto / eauto*) – the main feature, as we shall see, of hypostasis.

Hypostasis, if described through the concept of the individual, appears to be a substance of a certain kind, i.e. a substance (for instance of a human kind) qualified by essential differences, and also is informed by accidental features. A unique set of accidents is what makes a hypostasis sensuously and actually perceivable. In other words, a hypostasis can be discerned as a numerically different individual due to its peculiar characteristics.³⁴ And yet, the accidental characteristics of a certain hypostasis are not essential for it. They only serve to characterize and differentiate a hypostasis from others within the same species.

Being composed of essential and accidental features is, for John, insufficient to explain an individual entity *as such*: it may explain particular entities' individual discernibility, but provides no justification for their being individuals. What, according to him, is fundamental for an individual entity is its independent existence. He strongly emphasizes that a hypostasis has “existence by itself” and “subsists by itself.”³⁵ An entity that so exists neither subsists by virtue of its relation to something else nor needs any substrate of existence to exist itself.³⁶ Accepting a moderate form of realism, which stemmed from the Aristotelian tradition and Chalcedonian logic,³⁷ John stated that universal entities, such as substance, nature, form, species, etc., really exist, but only individuals *subsist by themselves*. Universal entities possess their existence only in particulars. To be precise, universals, in John's opinion, only actually subsist (*energeiai hyphistatai*) in hypostases. John stresses that, in contrast to a hypostasis, a substance devoid of form possesses *simple being*, while a substance informed by essential difference – a nature or species, that is – has a *certain kind of being*. Hence, the basic difference between hypostases and universal entities consists in their way of being: both substance and nature really exist in a way proper to themselves, but do not *actually subsist*

³³ Boethius, *On the Holy Trinity* 1.55–63; also Gracia 1984: 98–100.

³⁴ *Dialectica* 30.2–4, 31.29–34, 43.2–7, 43.21–23, 45.16–17.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 31.30, 38.10, 43.8–11, 50.11–13. ³⁶ *Ibid.* 4.61–67, 10.100–107, 40.2–6.

³⁷ Cf. Tatakis 2001: 11–112, esp. 68. Tatakis ascribes a “nominalistic attitude” to John.

by themselves, whereas *being by itself* or *actual subsisting*, which assumes both of those modes of being, is the exclusive preserve of hypostases.³⁸

Nonetheless, the hypostatical mode of existence neither defines nor constitutes all that may be attributed to the way in which a hypostasis is a being. John specifies that the hypostatic existence must "be sensuously, that is, actually, perceivable."³⁹ It seems, then, that perceivable being is a feature of the existence of a particular subject. In other words, *being by itself*, constituting the hypostatical mode of being, is identical with the *actual and perceivable existence* of an individual entity. In John's doctrine, the hypostatical mode of being – in the sense of the existence of a concrete individual – is the only true mode of existence. Everything that actually exists is either hypostasis itself or *enhypostaton*, where the latter just means that it subsists *in* a hypostasis.⁴⁰

This primordial role attributed to hypostases appears to lead John to the view that hypostasis is the principle of existence. This view prefigures the medieval and modern characterizations of existence as a modality or fact irreducible to any essential content or attribute of being. Admittedly, both nature and substance are kinds of beings, each endowed with its own mode of being. Still, these are modes of subsistence rather than existence, since nature and substance are what they are only as *enhypostata*. It is a hypostasis that *has* a substance, alongside with some accidents of this substance, and, next to that, *has being by itself*. John's Christological and anthropological considerations require that this possession of *being by itself* is not identified, unlike in Aristotle, with just being a being, no matter to which category a being belongs.⁴¹ John's argument relies, in part, on the Neoplatonic view of genera and species. Accordingly, he claims that species of the same genera are constituted by certain essential (*ousiodeis*) and natural (*physikai*) differences and qualities. Those differences and qualities constitute divisions within a genus (or a higher species) and establish species within the genus (so, "rational" divides genus "animal" and establishes the species "humanity"), i.e. they create separate species, substances, and natures. Those differences exist unchangeably and immanently in the species that they constitute.⁴² As essential differences establish the essence of species, it is impossible for them and their opposites to be in the same species. Incorporating an opposite would result in destroying this species and creating a new one. These broadly Neoplatonic claims, formulated initially within a metaphysics in which universal realities, like substances or natures, precede ontologically individuals, are applied by John within the Christian context which admits the compound hypostases of Christ and of

³⁸ *Dialectica* 43,8–11, 43,19–23; *Exposition* 50,8–13. ³⁹ *Dialectica* 31,30–31. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 45,2–8.

⁴¹ Cf. Aristotle's reasons against treating being as a genus: *Metaphysics* B.998b22–27.

⁴² *Dialectica* 10,190–220.

a human being. As John believes, different natures can be united in one compound hypostasis.⁴³ Against the Monophysites, he states that unified natures do not have their own proper hypostases, even though a nature cannot exist apart from a hypostasis.⁴⁴ If we allow compound hypostases, like a human being composed of body and soul, we must accept, as John claims, that actual being belongs to hypostasis, not to natures.

In a human individual, two natures, body and soul, are united unchangeably but without mixture, thus constituting one composite and integrated hypostasis. Body and soul subsist only as components of a human hypostasis. Soul, understood as a reality made up of spiritual matter, is not (unlike in Aristotle or Aquinas) the formative principle of the human individual. Only together with a physical body does it complete a human being in one hypostasis. Therefore, body and soul united can be considered the essence of human hypostasis. As such they need to be distinguished from hypostasis itself.⁴⁵ Hypostasis, viewed thus, emerges as the principle of the union and the existence of body and soul. Thus, the human hypostasis persists *as such* even after their separation in death.⁴⁶

Analogously, John accepts the orthodox doctrine that in Jesus Christ the preexistent hypostasis of God the Word assumed a complete human nature. He concludes that the divine and human natures do not subsist independently, but as hypostatic components of the one hypostasis of the Son of God. Consequently, the preexistent hypostasis of God the Word constitutes the existential principle of its essential components.⁴⁷ The hypostasis of God remains the principle of existence for both.

Those instances give to hypostasis the function of being the principle of existence of each particular in itself. The united natures have their existence due to participation in the hypostasis.⁴⁸ We may conclude that in John's ontology, it is hypostasis that is the principle of the existence and union of its essential components. As such, it may be viewed as the actual existence of its own essential content.

John's conception of the hypostatical mode of being goes far beyond traditional Platonic transcendental essentialism, which considers existence to be a property of essence or part of nature.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it exceeds earlier theological approaches to conceptualizing hypostases and

⁴³ *Dialectica* 42.16–20. ⁴⁴ *Exposition* 53.2–5.

⁴⁵ *Dialectica* 45.12–16, 67.8–24. On John's anthropology, see Gahbauer 1994.

⁴⁶ Since hypostasis is the principle of existence, it persists even though the form of the human particular was destroyed in death.

⁴⁷ *Exposition* 53.7–17, 71.18–28; see Schultze 1972. ⁴⁸ *Dialectica* 67.2–8, 67.21–24.

⁴⁹ On the relation of John's philosophical thought to that of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic distinction between essence and existence, see Zhyrkova 2010: 104–106; Ica 1995: 121.

modes of existence. The view that each member of the Holy Trinity exists according to the hypostatical mode of existence proper to it had already been developed by the Cappadocian Fathers and acknowledged by Byzantine theologians.⁵⁰ In turn, Chalcedon emphasized the independent existing, by itself, of hypostasis as such.⁵¹ John, however, did not merely apply those postulates in a larger theological context. His contribution consisted in giving them a broad context of logical and philosophical analysis. In consequence, his work offers a philosophically consistent definition of the hypostatical mode of being, placed in the framework of a larger description of what it means to be an individual. This description redefines several logical and philosophical terms, furnishing solid ground for later philosophical and theological discussions. In fact, John's conception seems closer to medieval philosophy than to the writings of his contemporaries and predecessors. On the one hand, his conception of hypostasis corresponds to the so-called Standard Theory of Individuality, broadly accepted in the early Middle Ages.⁵² On the other hand, it foreshadows the theories of existential and essential individuation – i.e. *sui generis* individuation – advocated by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus respectively. It is worth noting that even though John never explicitly considered the so-called “problem of individuation,” i.e. the question of what individuality is as such and what causes it, in the manner of medieval philosophers such as Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, Peter of Auvergne, John Baconthorpe, and Duns Scotus, they referred to him as one of the main authorities on the issue.⁵³

John, then, was continuing the struggle – initiated by patristic authors – to refashion classical logical and ontological notions as they entered the discourse of theology.⁵⁴ Yet through his efforts to elucidate the realities revealed in the mystery of the Incarnation adequately, he contributed to the creation of a fundamentally new metaphysics, the origins of which are usually ascribed only to medieval philosophy. Even more importantly, his quest to understand individual being provided the foundation for his arguments concerning the theology of icons.

⁵⁰ Halleux 1990: 113–214; Louth 2002: 48–47. On the conception of “mode of existence” to Maximos the Confessor, see Sherwood 1955: 155–166. John of Damascus also uses the term *tropos tes hyparxeos* to describe the Holy Trinity, e.g. *Exposition* 8.

⁵¹ Leontios of Byzantium, *Three Treatises against Nestorios and Eutyches* (= PG 86.1280A); Maximos, *Letter* 15, in PG 91.557D–60A; and the *Doctrina patrum* 137.4–7. Parallels also can be drawn with Boethius, *Against Eutyches* 2.159–160, 3.201–221.

⁵² Gracia 1988: 125–127.

⁵³ Godfrey of Fontaines, *Quodlibet* 7.5; Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* 2.8.69–95; Peter of Auvergne, *Quodlibet* 2.5.65–68; John Baconthorpe, *Quaestiones in quatuor libros sententiarum*, Sent. 3: 11.2.3; John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 7.422.

⁵⁴ Ica 1995: 116.

APPLYING THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE INDIVIDUAL
TO THE THEOLOGY OF ICONS

Having accepted traditional arguments in defense of icons as reasonable but not sufficient, John created a theology of icons focused on the reason why it is possible to make and worship religious images: the mystery of Incarnation. He elucidates this as a true union of divine and human natures in one single hypostasis. John insists that Christ's flesh neither was a garment nor constituted a fourth person of the Trinity. The human flesh of Christ was by no means an inessential or illusory addition to his divinity, as claimed by the Docetists. Neither, though, was it united with his divine part in one agglomerative nature, which would have been different from human nature as well as from divinity, thus introducing to the Trinity an entirely alien entity, different in its nature from God the Word. Christ's human nature, once united with divine nature in the single hypostasis of God the Word, never ceases to exist, and has not been lost in the Godhead. Humanity is an inseparable, essential component of the divine hypostasis of God the Son. It possesses the same principle of existence as Christ's divinity, existing as it does due to the one hypostasis of God the Word. Thus it cannot perish. From the Incarnation on, through death, resurrection, and ascension, human and divine natures exist unchanged as immutable, unmixed, and without separation in one hypostasis – all thanks to the hypostatical union. Human flesh, being a part of human nature, was not lost in divinity. Yet as the Word became flesh while remaining the Word, so human flesh became the Word while remaining flesh. God the Son can be depicted, then, not merely because He was incarnated in a human body, but above all because He truly remains human, with human flesh, while simultaneously truly being God.⁵⁵

Consequently, John can assert that an image of the invisible God is an image not of the invisible, but of that which has become visible. He has still not abandoned the view that it is impossible to make an image of the Godhead: it is impossible to depict even a spirit to which God gives breath, and the divine nature is uncircumscribed, admitting of no representation in respect of form or shape.⁵⁶ Christ's divine nature, though, is inseparable from his humanity, being united with it in the one hypostasis of God the Word. As Thomas Noble points out, a depiction that begins with the humanity of Christ will also inevitably reveal His divinity.⁵⁷ The Incarnate Son of God is the first, natural (*physike eikon*), and unchangeable image of the invisible God the Father, revealing the Father in Himself. He conveys in Himself the whole Father, being equal to Him in everything, and

⁵⁵ *Apologia* 1.4.62–77 = 3.6.62–77, 1.16.11–14, 3.26.16–18, 3.26.54–59.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 1.4.77–88 = 3.6.77–88, 3.24.13–15. ⁵⁷ Noble 1987: 103.

differing only in His being begotten by His Father, His Begetter.⁵⁸ An image of Christ, therefore, is not just an image of His humanity: on the one hand it is an image of the entire hypostasis of the Incarnated Word, while on the other it represents the first, natural, and consubstantial image of the Godhead.

Apart from turning the discussion of image-use into a Christological question, John also demonstrates its connection to soteriology. In his opinion, to reject icons is not just tantamount to negating Christ's true humanity; it is also a refusal to worship Him as the Son of God – the living image and immutable figure of the invisible God.⁵⁹ Because the Incarnate Son of God is inseparably a true human and a true God in one hypostasis, a rejection of the possibility of his depiction is equivalent to denying his humanity and, therefore, constitutes a denial of who He truly became and remains. On the other hand, repudiating icons puts into question the reality of the Incarnation. If the Son of God cannot be depicted in human flesh, then his Incarnation is in doubt, so the rejection of images challenges the very principle of our salvation, which is rooted in the reality of the Incarnation of God the Word, who became a true man for the sake of our salvation.⁶⁰ If the Incarnation is not real, our salvation is not possible. John protests that one who speaks against images should also keep the Sabbath and practice circumcision. Israel of old did not see God, while we see the Lord's glory face-to-face. Rejecting images commits one to submission before the Law, and so to a refusal of Christ and his salutary grace.⁶¹

In this way, John radically changed the character of the discussion of holy icons. Acceptance of the cult of icons, in his interpretation, is not a question of correct observance of Mosaic Law, but comes down to affirming Jesus Christ as God the Word truly Incarnate. The Mosaic Law only prefigured our worship, which is an image of eternal reward.⁶² A holy icon, then, is not merely an educational tool or intermediary useful for elevating us to the point where we obtain knowledge of what is hidden. For John it is itself an expression of the true faith and an instrument of salvation.⁶³

HISTORICAL EVALUATION

John's opinions affected the discussion of icons so deeply that it moved away from issues of idolatry to the ontology of images, and the entire

⁵⁸ *Apologia* 1.9.6–11, 3.18.6–8. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1.21.14–16 = 2.15.14–22.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 1.8.39–48 = 1.8.39–48, 2.5.3–10 = 3.2.3–10, 2.14.13–16 = 1.16.4–6. According to Rozemond 1959, this is the core of Damascenus' Christology.

⁶¹ *Apologia* 1.16.84–91 = 2.14.35–45. ⁶² *Ibid.* 2.15.17–22 = 1.17.14–22; 2.23.4–9. ⁶³ *Ibid.* 2.19.1–6.

Iconoclastic Controversy came to be considered a Christological issue.⁶⁴ But how, precisely, this happened is not clear. To be sure, John was, exceptionally, condemned and anathematized in 754 by the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria.⁶⁵ Yet there is only modest evidence that his argumentation was known in Byzantium before the ninth century.⁶⁶ Thomas Noble offers an interesting response to this discrepancy,⁶⁷ arguing that the omission of the Mosaic prohibition on images and idolatry, and the construction of a Christological argument against icons, in Constantine V's *Peuseis* (*Positions* on the matter of images) constitute a response to John's Christological justification of icons. Admitting that two natures have been united without confusion in the one person of Jesus Christ, Constantine challenges the very possibility of an image of a being endowed with two natures, one spiritual and one material. The emperor deems this impossible as it inevitably involves "circumscribing" the divine nature, which is "uncircumscribed" by definition.⁶⁸ The polemical structure of the argument makes it plausible that Constantine is rejecting John's conclusions, but without either rejecting his premises or referring to his argument and thereby giving it unwanted publicity. Analogously, it is possible that the theologians gathered at Hieria decided to condemn John without actually addressing his arguments. Thus, they just condemned their author, while rejecting religious imagery by invoking the age-old charges of idolatry and lack of explicit endorsement of icons in the tradition.⁶⁹ Thomas Noble claims that there is some other evidence to show that John's works were well known at Hieria. That the Council appended a patristic florilegium was, on the one hand, a demonstration of solidarity with ecclesiastic tradition. On the other, it was also a way of confronting John's own collections placed at the end of his *Apologies*.⁷⁰

One would thus expect some recognition to have been given to John by the Iconodule Council summoned in 787 at Nicaea. Instead, the Council passed over his teachings. He and his ideas were certainly also known to the Iconodules, as they did not neglect to revoke his anathema.⁷¹ Thomas Noble seems right in pointing out that the Council Fathers intended to minimize, if not sweep away, the role of emperors in the Iconoclastic controversy, primarily placing the blame on Jews, Muslims, and rebellious

⁶⁴ See n. 9.

⁶⁵ While patriarch Germanos and George of Cyprus were anathematized once each, John received special attention, being anathematized four times: Mansi 1758–1798: v. 13, 356.

⁶⁶ Louth 2002: 197–198. ⁶⁷ Noble 1987: 103–104; 2009: 94–96.

⁶⁸ Constantine V, *Peuseis*, fr. 141, 142, 144–146, 150–151. It is surprising that many scholars ignore John's original achievement, ascribing the turn in the debate over images to Constantine V. On this, and on the *Peuseis* and the Christological argumentation in it, see Alexander 1958: 48–49, 172 ff.; Gero 1977: 37–54, 166; Ostrogorski 1964: 8–15; Sideris 1979: 182–187; cf. also Parry 1996: 99–113.

⁶⁹ See the *Horos of the Council of Hieria*; cf. Anastos 1955; Gero 1977: 53–110.

⁷⁰ Noble 1987; 2009: 97. ⁷¹ Mansi 1758–1798: v. 13, 357B–C; De' Maffei 1974: 42.

bishops. In this light, any use of John's works concerning icons, in which he heavily and sharply criticized the emperor's policy toward icons and refuted the right of rulers to intervene on theological issues,⁷² would have been an affront to the reigning dynasty.⁷³ The other reason for neglecting his teaching was probably the fact that the Council did not intend to go beyond accepted tradition. The scope of the Council of 787 allowed for a complete refutation of the Council of 754, but not for the introduction of new theological conceptions.⁷⁴ To be sure, John's Christological and soteriological vision of icons emerged from the orthodox tradition, but his theological vision might well have been too revolutionary for the Council, which was just aiming to restore the traditional order and its system.

John's theology of icons went far beyond what the Nicæan Fathers were ready to accept, and captured the attention of theologians only in the ninth century.⁷⁵ Certainly, we are beholden to Theodore the Stoudite and Nikephoros of Constantinople for further development of the theology of icons. But it was John of Damascus who laid the foundations for Theodore's and Nikephoros' conceptions. He was the first to instigate an ontological turn in discussions of religious imagery, introducing Christological and soteriological dimensions to the understanding of icons. His impact on theology is undeniable, but, in this author's opinion, ironically his own revolutionary ideas also contributed to his writings being judged unoriginal and merely compilatory. On the one hand, John's works were indeed an embodiment of Orthodoxy and the eastern tradition. On the other, in his ingenious philosophical development, and in his bold theology of icons, he went so far that his approach does seem to have exceeded the merely traditional. Thus, immediately after Nicæa II, it probably seemed preferable to consider his works as mere collections of traditional material and ignore their originality. In this way many of John's ground-breaking ideas became an essential part of the eastern Orthodox tradition – as if they had belonged to the older tradition that he was then seen to have merely passed on, rather than originating with him. Medieval thinkers in the west, though, did

⁷² *Apologia* 1.1.24–34, 1.66.8–16, 2.4 (whole chapter), 2.12.19–47, 2.16.61–90, 3.41 (whole chapter).

⁷³ Noble 1987: 106–107; 2009: 83. Noble also observes that another theologian who, surprisingly, received hardly any attention at Nicæa II was Maximos the Confessor, also known for his criticism of imperial involvement in theological doctrine. Similarly, neither interpolated versions of the letters of Gregory II, nor the letter of Gregory III mentioned by Hadrian, which also contained a critique of Leo III, were read at Nicæa II. Furthermore, other mid-century iconophile treatises (such as George of Cyprus' *Nouthesia gerontos*, the *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum* in *PG* 95:309–344, and the *Adversus Iconostastas* in *PG* 96:1348c–1361d) were probably omitted from the Nicæan document on account of their strong disapproval of the emperor Constantine V: see Noble 2009: 83 n. 150; Parry 1996: 136; Speck 1978: 134–140; Van den Ven 1955–1957: 336–338.

⁷⁴ Fazzo 1988: 358; Nichols 1988: 172; Schönborn 1976: 148. ⁷⁵ Noble 1987: 105; 2009: 106–108.

not know that any such label was attached to John's reputation and did not hesitate to recognize his innovations. Indeed, it merits restating that for them John was a leading authority on several philosophical and theological issues. Paradoxically, though, this did not prevent one of the greatest minds of eastern thought – the jewel in the patristic epoch's crown – from going down in history as a mere compiler, credited merely with having collected together and passed down existing elements of the tradition.

CHAPTER 26

MICHAEL PSELLOS

DAVID JENKINS

Of all the contributors to the intellectual history of Byzantium, there is no one quite like Michael Psellos. A master stylist who revived both philosophy and autobiography, he is among the greatest and most controversial writers in Byzantine history. His enormous corpus, which includes more than 500 letters, many orations, philosophical lectures, literary analyses, and a full-length history of his times, reveals a man who described himself above all as a philosopher, but he was also a courtier who vied for influence at the highest levels of power. Often favored by the emperor and at odds with the patriarch, he possessed both talent and ambition in abundance. Since appreciation of the former has always been complicated by judgments about the latter, the truth of his claims and the aims of his philosophy have often been questioned. Whatever the case may be, the assumption that philosophy and ambition are mutually exclusive was never shared by Michael Psellos.

The details of his biography are far from clear, but its outlines are well known.¹ He was born in Constantinople in 1018 to a family of modest means. He was close to his mother, who made sure that he received the best possible education. In his youth he served as the secretary to a provincial judge; by 1042 he was a member of the imperial chancellery and quickly rose during the reign of Constantine Monomachos, who filled his court with young intellectuals. Psellos became an orator and teacher and was eventually promoted to the chair of philosophy at the emperor's new university with the title of the Consul of Philosophers (*hypatos ton philosophon*). In 1054, Psellos' position at court became tenuous, and he took refuge with his friend John Xiphilinos as a monk on Mt Olympos in Bithynia (where he exchanged his given name, Constantine, for the monastic, Michael). His stay there was short-lived and within a year he returned to Constantinople, where he served subsequent emperors in a variety of

¹ Work on the biography of Psellos has been greatly aided by Moore 2005, an exhaustive inventory of the extant manuscripts, and Jeffreys et al. 2011, a prosopographical database of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that provides a wealth of information about Psellos, including summaries of his many letters.

capacities though his influence appears to wane. The date and circumstances of his death have long been debated, but it seems likely that he died late in the reign of Michael VII Dukas (1071–1078).²

The range of Psellos' abilities can be seen in the many roles he played. His claim to have recited the entire *Iliad* as a youth suggests the kind of precocious talent that allowed him to enter the ranks of the professionally literate at so early an age.³ This talent extended to oratory, and it appears that he first came to the attention of the court on account of his talent for extemporaneous speaking, a skill of which he repeatedly boasted as did a satire written shortly after his death, in which bystanders at a trial marveled at the speed and quality of his spontaneous composition of the proceedings.⁴ He also excelled at more polished orations and was often called upon to deliver speeches at important state occasions, of which the encomium, the speech in praise of an emperor, became his specialty. As a scholar and teacher he took full advantage of his privileged access to books and spent much of his time reading ancient texts in all genres, an activity frequently (and defensively) mentioned in his letters and reflected in his many excerpts, paraphrases, commentaries, and lectures. As a writer, he composed in all the genres cultivated in Byzantium and authored two of its most enduring works, the *Chronographia*, a history of the emperors of his time, and the *Encomium for his Mother*, more his own autobiography than the title would suggest.⁵ This unprecedented literacy, both acquired and performed, was the basis of his influence at court, extending from the lowest notaries of the chancellery, whose careers he often advanced, to the emperor himself, whom he sometimes advised and represented. There can be no doubt that Psellos exaggerated the extent of this influence, self-reported and self-promoting as it was, but it remains one of the remarkable feats of his career that he maintained such proximity to the throne through so many years and changes of regime.⁶ It is clear from his own writings that he was engaged in a constant struggle with his rivals at court, and although maintaining his position was never easy, it seems few played the game of imperial patronage as well as Psellos.

While Psellos contributed to the intellectual history of Byzantium in nearly all areas of learning, he is especially distinguished for a philosophical sensibility that both challenged his contemporaries and accommodated his ambition. Three themes in particular might serve to introduce it. First and foremost was his promotion of philosophy itself, by which he meant

² For a more detailed biography, see Papaioannou 2013: 4–13. For the date of his death, see Kaldellis 2011.

³ Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 6b.

⁴ *Timarion* 1028–1032 (p. 86). For an analysis of this passage, see Jenkins 2006a: 143–145.

⁵ For his literary and rhetorical achievements, see Papaioannou 2013.

⁶ For his exaggerated influence, see Jeffrey 2010.

primarily ancient Greek thought with a preference for the Neoplatonists and the logical works of Aristotle.⁷ He took particular pride in reviving philosophy, which he claimed his own generation had largely abandoned. In fact, it was precisely as a philosopher that he distinguished himself from his strictly rhetorical peers, and he made much of the opposition between philosophy and rhetoric, arguing for the superiority of the former in dismissing the slavish imitation of Hermogenes, the rhetorical model of that time.⁸ Second, Psellos pursued a deeper understanding of natural causation, and he chided his students for invoking the divine far too quickly in their attempts to explain mundane events.⁹ Though there is some evidence of his own experimentation, his knowledge of the natural sciences was essentially that of the ancients, and he readily accepted both alchemy and demonology.¹⁰ Therefore, his work in this regard was largely devoted to clarifying the logic of causation by means of Aristotle's demonstrative syllogisms. Since he was convinced that this logic permeated all levels of reality, he sought to identify it in all traditions and disciplines of knowledge, from what passed in antiquity as "Chaldaean" lore to the Christian Fathers, and from metaphysics to medicine. He was the greatest polymath of his time, and his works are full of investigations of strange phenomena and oracular literature, all of which he gleaned for further clues to the workings of God's creation. Finally, Psellos embraced the body and the life of the senses. He was neither a mystic nor an ascetic, and he spoke often of his enjoyment of natural beauty, of wine and food, and of horses and flowers. He is often credited with inaugurating an ethos of humanism into Byzantine intellectual life, stressing that the human being is a mixture of opposites, of a higher and a lower element, and that while some are able to ascend to the pinnacle of the higher, he preferred to navigate a middle course, which is where he encouraged the emperor to meet him as well. In all three instances, we see Psellos stake his success on the expanded influence of philosophy and science and on a greater interpretative and allegorical license.

While these themes characterize his general sensibility, attempts to credit Psellos with a more specific philosophical originality have yielded modest results.¹¹ Many of his philosophical texts are in fact excerpts and

⁷ Although his philosophical reading covered the entire ancient Greek tradition and he championed Plato, he was more directly influenced by Proklos and Plotinos. He admired Aristotle's treatment of the syllogism but often complained about his lack of clarity in other matters; see e.g. Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 106.114.

⁸ See Chapter 6.

⁹ E.g. see Psellos, *Reproach of his Students for their Lack of Interest* (= *Oratoria minora* op. 24.48–55).

¹⁰ See Chapters 13 and 14. Olympiodoros was one of his particular favorites; see *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, op. 19–24. Psellos claims to have constructed several simple pneumatic devices described by Heron; see *Oratoria minora* op. 8.168–178. For his alchemic recipes, see Chapter 14.

¹¹ Ierodiakonou 2002a: 172–179.

paraphrases that merely reflect his wide reading and preferences.¹² When he did apply his learning to a particular issue, it was often in the context of a lecture, speech, or letter. In each instance, both pedagogical and rhetorical conventions conditioned his treatment, which was further limited by Church teaching. Psellos was always introducing others to philosophy and always under the eyes of his more conservative critics. The result is that many of his philosophical arguments are succinctly made and can often be reduced to a simple conceptual form.

Psellos tells us that he acquired “conceptual precision” from Proklos of Athens, the great fifth-century systematizer of Neoplatonism, and his conceptual form does in fact map the Neoplatonic logic of causation. Proklos defined this logic as three states in simultaneous motion: the cause proceeds to the effect (*proodos*), the effect returns to the cause (*epistrophe*), and both cause and effect remain in one another by means of a shared identity (*monē*).¹³ Further, because the cause was considered to be both prior to and higher than the effect, the conceptualization of the movement between them extended along both horizontal and vertical axes: the cause as prior proceeds horizontally to a subsequent effect, but it also descends vertically as higher to lower. Therefore, in order to integrate and distinguish between these two simultaneous movements, the prior cause was conceptualized as proceeding to its subsequent effect through the mediation of vertical correlates (think of the side view of two steps connected by a riser). Proklos extended this logic to unity and multiplicity and clarified the identity of their vertical correlates by means of a variable of participation. The prior cause was therefore transposed as an “unparticipated” unity that then proceeded in analogous fashion through the mediation of a descent from a higher “participated” unity to a lower “participating” multiplicity until finally reaching its subsequent correlate in the purely not-one of a “non-participating” multiplicity.¹⁴ In order to resolve the apparent contradiction that an unparticipated unity does somehow proceed and descend to the other correlates, Proklos employed the Neoplatonic notion of illumination, an overflowing that also allowed the non-participating multiplicity to ascend in return.¹⁵ Formally then, two opposite correlates stand and move in two relationships, one of difference, the other of identity. In his *Encomium for Xiphilinos*, Psellos praised his understanding of philosophy’s first principles:

¹² For the composition of his philosophical works, see O’Meara 1981: 33.

¹³ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.38. For a detailed account of Psellos’ conceptual precision, see Jenkins 2006b.

¹⁴ The “non-participating” multiplicity of the “not-one” inherent in multiplicity is implied but not altogether explicit in Proklos: Jenkins 2009: 120.

¹⁵ Psellos often described the effects of this illumination as divine “impressions” (*emphaseis*) and its binding force as a “mysterious sympathy” (*arretos sympatheia*). For his appropriation of *sympatheia*, see Ierodiakonou 2006.

Who realized that the highest object of thought (*to hyperkeimenon*) is paradoxically both a whole and a part? Who clarified the mixture of opposites, of being and non-being, and who maintained both their unity and distinction better than even Plato's *Sophist* . . . ?¹⁶

Whereas Proklos' application of this logic to the cosmos as a whole was complicated by the fact that Neoplatonism required more than two levels, Psellos tended to restrict himself to the cosmic equivalents of the four necessary correlates, namely, the One or God (unparticipated unity), Intellect (participated unity), Soul (participating multiplicity) and Matter or Body (non-participating multiplicity), where Soul extends as a participating multiplicity from its lowest point in bodily sensation to its highest in the *theoria* of the Intellect (think of Soul as the riser).¹⁷ For Psellos this was the Golden Chain, the conceptually precise master analogy that extends through all levels of reality as the structure of nature itself. He therefore considered it compatible with Christian teaching, especially with pseudo-Dionysios, Maximos the Confessor, and Gregory of Nazianzos, even though he identified the scheme specifically with Greek philosophy:

The Greeks propose two realms of being, what is beyond nature and the natural . . . Accustomed to connecting opposites by means of a middle, they place mathematical substance (*mathematike ousia*) between these two since . . . it is beneath Intellect but above sensation as a kind of middle between the same and the other . . . a composite, but timeless and eternal, a staircase for us to ascend from nature to the highest philosophy.¹⁸

While the horizontal axis of the form schematizes the procession, remaining, and return of causation, we can see that Psellos' other particular interests – such as logic, mathematics, and harmonics – all converge on “mathematical substance.” Each one is a transparent analog of the identity between unity and multiplicity: logic as subject and predicate, mathematics as magnitude and number, and harmonics as pitch and octave.¹⁹ Though he borrowed much from Porphyry and Aristotle, he framed his ethics in this way as well, characterizing the ascent of the Soul toward the good as the ascent from multiplicity to unity.²⁰ Even his theological

¹⁶ Psellos, *Encomium for Xiphilinos* 457.

¹⁷ For a diagram of Proklos' scheme of the entire Neoplatonic cosmos, see Dodds' edition of Proklos, *Elements of Theology* 282; regarding its complications, see Jenkins 2009: 120 n. 38. Of the many passages describing this scheme, see e.g. Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 64.92–95, 75.38–39; *When He Declined the Rank of Protasekretis* 96–100 (= *Oratoria minora* 8).

¹⁸ Psellos, *To Those who Asked about the Number of Philosophical Discourses* (= *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, op. 3.53–64).

¹⁹ Three long passages in particular detail his philosophical interests: Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.38; *Encomium for his Mother* 27–28; *Encomium for Xiphilinos* 456–459. It is not surprising that he was especially interested in the harmonic arithmetic of Plato's *Timaeus* (35a–36b): Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, op. 4–6.

²⁰ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 95.121–126.

thought is stamped with this scheme, applied to both the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ. In fact, in the *Chronographia* Psellos claims to have contributed something new to theology, which on closer inspection in his lectures appears to be either the suggestion that God's descent in his procession is in proportion to our own ascent in return, or that the Holy Spirit is best conceived as the middle between the antithesis of the Father and the Son.²¹

We might grant that an antithesis of a higher and lower opposite balanced by a shared middle had obvious pedagogical advantages as a simple form that students (and an emperor) could understand and retain, or that it was the preferred rhetorical device of an extemporaneous performer who knew how best to present philosophical ideas in letters and speeches. We might even assume that only the lowest and safest common denominator of Greek philosophy gave Psellos any chance of selling a novel form of rhetorical sophistication under the scrutiny of his orthodox critics (he was twice ordered to make a public confession of faith). Whatever the reasons were, his schematic simplification of Neoplatonism is for the most part unremarkable, as are his frequent descriptions of the Soul's ascent to the pinnacle of Mind and of the mystical vision that occurs there. We can find it all where Psellos himself found it, in Plotinos, Proklos, and pseudo-Dionysios, and in any number of both pagan and Christian mystics.

Nevertheless, several features of Psellos' appropriation of this conceptual form highlight how he did in fact challenge his contemporaries in a fundamentally philosophical way. First, he accepted the form in its entirety, and his conviction that a shared middle required two opposites granted legitimacy to both. He repeatedly emphasized that logic required both unity and multiplicity, causation both cause and effect, and the chain of being both God and matter. The first opposite was of course prior and higher, but the second and lower was equally necessary. Even though Psellos was careful to qualify this conceptual correlation as a consequence of human limitation, the degree to which he embraced and then operated within that limitation was what often separated him from his peers and aroused the suspicion of his critics.

Psellos developed this idea in a variety of contexts. In a letter to a friend, he embellished his greeting with a philosophical analogy: even though he is inferior to his correspondent, that does not mean they cannot converse, for just as the *logos* binds the body to the soul, the soul to the mind and the

²¹ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.42; *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 64.141–147; and op. 68.117–121. He also thought that the idea of the “return” might prove helpful in the *filiouque* controversy since just as all being proceeds from and then yearns to return to the unparticipated unity of the One, so too does the Holy Spirit proceed directly from the Father, to whom alone it yearns to return; see Psellos, *Encomium for Keroularios* 348.

mind to God, so too does it bind him to his friend, who, though he represents the higher procession of mind, still requires the completion of Psellos' lower return.²² Further, in one of his more original compositions, a long allegorical exegesis on the letters of the alphabet, Psellos described the ascent of the soul beginning with the letter *zeta* (the sixth letter of the Greek alphabet) since our first response to wonder is to seek (*zetein*) after its cause.²³ However, just before reaching the soul's final destination within the infinity of God (the final letter, *omega*), Psellos made a stop at the letter *phi*, for *phenomena*, in the sense that we should seek to understand only what God makes apparent, leaving what is unseen and secret to faith. Here he again invokes pseudo-Dionysios and attempts to distinguish between the apparent and hidden elements of the divine nature, but what he describes as ultimately apparent in phenomena is also what is hidden in the Trinity and the person of Christ, namely, the relationship of unity and multiplicity, the logic of participation and the movements of procession and return, in other words the elements and dynamic of his conceptual form. The form therefore reveals both the deep structure of reality and the irreducibility of the structure itself.

Consequently, since the opposites are bound together and mediated by a shared middle, Psellos' focus was always drawn to the middle itself. No idea is more characteristic of his thought than the middle. We have already seen how he used it to frame his understanding of mathematical substance, but he also employed it to define the Soul, the Intellect, the person of Christ, nature, the human being, and even himself.²⁴ In a letter addressed to a provincial judge, he best summarized the ambiguity of his own nature:

I am neither completely separated from matter nor completely immersed in it, for I am partly divine while living with a body. And so I do not like to be completely earthbound nor am I convinced by those who compel us to soar beyond nature. It has been my wont to stand or move between extremes. I like the proverb, "Avoid extremes." It is my favorite, and I prefer it to other maxims since I am the middle of two opposites, one lower, the other higher.²⁵

The middle is also where he resolved his central pedagogical and political theme, the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, positing between them his preference for the "political."²⁶ In each instance, his

²² Psellos, *Letter to the Protosynkellos* 110.

²³ Psellos, *An Interpretation of the Twenty-four Letters* (= *Philosophica minora*, v. 1, op. 36); see Ierodiakonou 2006: 110–117.

²⁴ Examples of each: Soul: Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 97.32–4; Mind: *ibid.* op. 59.126; the person of Christ: *Oration on the Annunciation* (= *Orationes hagiographicae* 2.97–104); Nature: *Reproach of his Students for their Lack of Interest* (= *Oratoria minora* op. 24.57–61); the human being: *Letter S 7* (p. 232.19–22); himself: *Letter KD 160* (p. 187.12–16).

²⁵ Psellos, *Letter KD 35* (p. 57.20–27); *Letter S 7*. ²⁶ Psellos, *Letter S 174*.

fundamental philosophical conviction is that two levels of reality, one higher, the other lower, participate in one another by means of a shared middle. However, given his interest in logic, Psellos also realized that there was something inherently problematic about the conceptual middle. Though the horizontal axis of our representation suggests that two discreet correlates do in fact share a middle when they are vertically aligned, no third element marks this identity, and if we were to posit one, our attention would return to the horizontal axis where this shared middle is depicted. In other words, the attempt to identify the shared element precisely in the middle becomes an infinite regress simply because every identification posits a middle that can only be resolved by another middle. Like any dichotomous paradox, this is both obvious and unnerving, but paradoxes are of central importance to both logic and mathematics, and their history stretches from Zeno and Plato's Third Man argument to Bertrand Russell and the infinities of Georg Cantor.²⁷

In this sense, the form's two axes can be seen to depict the distinction between (vertical) continuity and (horizontal) discontinuity. The Greeks first confronted this distinction when the diagonal of the square was proved to be incommensurable with its side, an event of disputed significance, but it was said that the unfortunate Pythagorean who discovered this fact drowned at sea, overwhelmed, as it were, by the impossible infinity he had revealed. In any event, the logical contradiction implied here meant that a clear distinction had to be drawn between a magnitude and a number. Like anyone who had read Aristotle, Psellos knew that incommensurability was due to the fact that a magnitude's continuity was infinitely divisible.²⁸ His letters and other writings are sprinkled with references to this and related issues, such as the squaring of the circle and the doubling of the area of a cube.²⁹ Nevertheless, although he had studied Euclid, Heron, and Nikomachos of Gerasa, his facility with first-order mathematics appears to have been elementary at best, and he admitted that his interest in these issues lasted only until they transported him to higher things.³⁰ Few would have

²⁷ Psellos was well aware of Zeno: *Letter to Xiphilinos* 39; *Encomium for Xiphilinos* 461. He also commented at length on the liar's paradox ("I am now lying"): *Theologica*, v, 1, op. 54.70–106; see Georgiorgakis 2009.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 95b; *Physics* 207b. Unfortunately, the authorship of a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* often attributed to Psellos has been seriously disputed: Benakis 2008: 5*–10*, and Golitsis 2007, for arguments pro and contra.

²⁹ E.g. Psellos, *Theologica*, v, 1, op. 8A.32; *Oration on the Emperor Monomachos* (= *Orationes panegyricae* 2.517); *Oration on the Emperor Constantinos Monomachos* (= *Orationes panegyricae* 6.199); *Defense of the Nomophylax against Ophrydas* (= *Orationes forenses* 3.145–157); *Letter S* 187 and 89.

³⁰ For example, Psellos was confused about the triangular numbers discussed by Nikomachos of Gerasa (*Introduction to Mathematics* 2.8–15), thinking that the series 1, 3, 6, 10, 15, etc., represented the lengths of the descending sides of a properly constructed three-sided pyramid rather than the units of progressively larger equilateral triangles: Westerink 1987. For transporting to higher things, see Psellos, *Letter T* 42.

transported him as quickly as incommensurability, and Psellos confessed that he was “unable not to reflect upon the continuity of extension or not to contemplate . . . what the incommensurable [is].”³¹

However, several scholia on Euclid attributed to Psellos suggest that his reflection on the incommensurable struggled to fully grasp how a magnitude possesses an infinite number of divisions that are smaller than any given unit of measure.³² Although Euclid himself never assigned quantities to the magnitudes that he used to demonstrate incommensurability, numerical values are obviously implied in determining their relative lengths, and commentators soon attempted to clarify his propositions with examples citing the “sides” of particular numbers (i.e. their square roots). Psellos readily acknowledged that magnitudes are infinitely divisible, but, like other scholiasts, he could not conceive of an arithmetic of incommensurability that was not entirely made up of integers. For Psellos, the numbers 24 and 30 are commensurable with one another because they share a common measure (i.e. 6), but 19 and 29 are incommensurable because they do not.³³ This of course misses the point: because they share the common measure of one, all integers are commensurable with one another. The confusion perhaps reflects the enduring strength of Pythagorean arithmetic, which maintained that the monad, while being the “principle of number,” is not itself a number.³⁴ Whatever the case may be, Psellos did not take the monad to be a shared measure in this instance, which meant that, at least arithmetically, he did not conceive of the incommensurability of the “side” of 2 as something fundamentally different from the indivisibility of two integers.

This conceptual difficulty is also reflected in Psellos’ understanding of infinite divisibility. While he was careful to qualify the infinities of divisibility and extension so “cleverly” discussed by Aristotle as conceptual (the only real infinity is God), he did accept Aristotle’s distinction that infinity is only potential, never actual, since at any particular division or point of extension, a finite cut or step is made.³⁵ Psellos emphasized this point by means of Plotinos’ correlation of time (*chronos*) with *aion*, the former the measurement of motion, the latter its motionless paradigm.³⁶ For human beings the infinity of *aion* can only be understood as something finite in time. This same limitation necessarily transposes continuous elements into a discrete series, which is why Gregory of Nazianzos could speak of the Trinity as a monad moving to a dyad and then on to a triad.³⁷ For Psellos, the inevitable transposing of the continuous into the discontinuous, and of

³¹ Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 27b.

³² Moore 2005: 310–311; Psellos, *Scholia on Euclid* 98–102; Psellos, *Letter R* 123–124.

³³ Psellos, *Scholia on Euclid* 99–100, scholium 15. ³⁴ Aristotle, *Topics* 108b.

³⁵ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 85.29–35. ³⁶ *Ibid.* v. 2, op. 32. ³⁷ *Ibid.* v. 1, op. 20.78–93.

the infinite into the finite, is simply indicative of the fact that human consciousness is limited by the discursive nature of language. In the same sense, since he could not conceive of an irrational number, i.e. a number that is not an integer or a ratio of integers, his encounter with incommensurability tended to sharpen the distinction between a magnitude and a number simply because the potentiality of a magnitude's infinite divisibility was something entirely different from the actuality of any particular number.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that every magnitude, no matter how small, is also a number simply because a magnitude is always potentially a given unit of measure. Psellos was clear on this point as well: the diagonal of a square is a real length and is only incommensurable with its side when the side is chosen as the unit of measure.³⁸ The paradox is that, since a smaller measure can always be chosen, the infinite divisibility of conceptual continuity is always potentially *real*. In fact, Psellos believed that the real infinity of *aion* is somehow present in the conceptual continuity of time. Although Plotinos clearly distinguished that continuity from the infinity of *aion*, when Psellos developed this theme on his own, he stressed how time yearns to imitate *aion* and falls necessarily short, but he granted that it succeeds in one respect, in the continuity of motion, in which time "exactly mirrors" its paradigm.³⁹ Later in the same essay, Psellos based his hope of time's eventual return to *aion* on the fact that there already exists "a completely harmonious symphony of time mixed with *aion*, of one opposite correlated with its other."⁴⁰ This idea was further strengthened by his conviction that no matter how fleeting its illumination might seem to us, we do in fact participate in God's real infinity thanks to Christ's redemptive mediation, which he understood precisely as the soul's continuity between the extremes of the One and the body:

As soon as the soul cast off its reflected beauty by disregarding the command of God, this divine series was broken, its elements no longer bound by proportional participation. Instead, they were torn apart, and the whole became a part and their commonality became a great multiplicity. Christ has therefore been called the cornerstone since He was unified through the mediation of His soul so that the extremes of the One and the body might be joined and we might become spirit and mind and God.⁴¹

Psellos therefore gives us the impression that his engagement with this fundamental paradox was analytical enough to produce an effect in his own thought much like a regress that converges on a middle of smaller and

³⁸ Psellos, *Scholia on Euclid* 94, scholium 9. A magnitude is incommensurable only by comparison (*thesei*), never by nature (*physei*).

³⁹ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 2, op. 32.53. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* op. 32.99–102.

⁴¹ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 62.71–77.

smaller extension. As soon as he reached a middle, he divided it in two, only to reach and divide again. Unlike many of his Christian and Neoplatonic predecessors who stressed the vertical ascent of the soul, Psellos exhibited a much more horizontal orientation that suggests the presence and effect of this regress. For example, though he admitted that he was no mystic, he did, in typically Neoplatonic fashion, conceive of the soul as aspiring to ascend from sensation to the pinnacle of the Intellect, and he often speculated on what this experience must be like.⁴² Nevertheless, the vertical orientation of these speculations is flattened by the fact that Psellos associated the ascent so closely with the middle. In a speech, which he claims to have improvised over dinner, Psellos praised the utility of mathematics, defining the science in Aristotelian terms by dividing it first into arithmetic and geometry.⁴³ He explained that this division occurs because the absolute middle between these terms, the *mesaitaton*, is the distinction between continuity (*syneches*) and discontinuity (*diorismenon*). He further clarified this point by saying that in order to be as precise as possible we should identify the *mesaitaton* as the *theoria* of the Intellect, which is what the philosophical soul actually aspires to. This idea is consistently presented in his theological lectures as well, where, although he describes the stages of the soul's ascent to God, he conceives of it as a reciprocal meeting in which God rewards the soul's ability to ascend with His own proportional descent.⁴⁴ For Psellos, not only was the soul a middle as the extension along which the ascent occurs, the goal of the ascent was itself a middle, in fact, the exact middle. However, since the exact middle is of course a continuity and infinitely divisible, it can only be experienced as a discrete series, which forces the vertical ascent to rotate toward the horizontally discrete and then back again ad infinitum. No matter where we think we are in the ascent, we are always in the middle of a discrete series, which is exactly what we see in geometrical proofs for incommensurability.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that Psellos described the ascent as never-ending and his own attempts at it as an ever-increasing mental tension that was incapable of overcoming some final duality, a failure that forced him to find relief in sensation before attempting to ascend again.⁴⁶ This is his oscillating double-course (*diaulos*) between the *theoria* of philosophy and the meadows (*leimones*) of rhetoric.⁴⁷ However much Psellos might have aspired to achieve mystical

⁴² E.g. *ibid.* op. 94.26–86; *Letter KD* 36.

⁴³ Psellos, *An Improvised Answer to Andronikos Asking about the Purpose of Geometry* 159–163.

⁴⁴ E.g. Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 65.

⁴⁵ E.g. the attempt to measure the hypotenuse of an isosceles right triangle with the length of its side results in an infinite series of smaller and smaller isosceles right triangles.

⁴⁶ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 94.70–75; *ibid.* op. 75.66–72; 56.90; 91.119; *Letter S* 187.

⁴⁷ Psellos, *Theologica*, v. 1, op. 89.84–90; *Letter KD* 105.

union, he had basically eliminated its conceptual possibility. He himself tells us that his retreat to the monastery was doomed to failure because, although he was able to converse with his friend Xiphilinos about visible things, they found no common ground regarding what was invisible.⁴⁸

The general tendencies of his thought therefore reflect a markedly analytical appropriation of conceptual form. His commitment to a correlated pair of opposites not only allowed him to rationalize and then rehabilitate the body and the life of the senses, it also directed philosophy's attention to the dynamics between them, to causation and the analogs of unity and multiplicity, to the logic of the natural world, and to mathematics, music, and science. Moreover, though he acknowledged our participation in God, his experience of the infinite regress implied in conceptual infinity deepened his sense for the absolute separation between this world and the world beyond it. Psellos never wavered in his conviction about the existence of the latter, but he was equally convinced that it was beyond the grasp of discursive thought.⁴⁹ The ironic distinction that he drew between himself and his greatest political rival, the patriarch Michael Keroularios, is very telling in this respect: whereas Psellos labored to learn about this world, the patriarch mystically convened with the next.⁵⁰ Although he could express himself with pious sentiment, Psellos' sensibility was decidedly secular.⁵¹ He was a connoisseur of the limitations that defined the human being, conceptual or otherwise, including his own, and his letters are full of his own uncertainties and doubts. His thought therefore combined a formal precision that conceived this world as absolutely structured with an analytical rigor that conceived the world mirrored in conceptual infinity as absolutely unknowable.

We see this same sensibility in the encomia delivered late in his life as we do in his early school lectures, with whose audience Psellos' legacy begins. Even though they sometimes frustrated him on account of their laziness and lack of interest, his students staffed the court as notaries and other officials and provided him with a network of contacts that strengthened his political influence; some also became churchmen.⁵² One student in particular, John Italos, exhibited special promise and even clashed with

⁴⁸ Psellos, *Encomium for Xiphilinos* 444.

⁴⁹ For his belief in a world beyond sense, see Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.40; *Theologica*, v. 2, op. 32. 14–22. For the limits of discursive thought, see *Letter to Xiphilinos* 55.

⁵⁰ Psellos, *Letter S* 207; *Accusation against Keroularios* (= *Orationes forenses* 1.262A).

⁵¹ Psellos' piety has been seriously questioned: Kaldellis 1999. He did write several hagiographic texts though these are all certainly more rhetorical (in a broad sense) than religious. The same discursive limitation qualified his understanding of the miraculous: our experience of a miracle's infinite nature is limited by our finite ability to receive it; see e.g. *Orationes hagiographicae* 4.684.

⁵² For his often amusing complaints about his students, see Psellos, *Oratoria minora* 21–24. For his network of contacts, see Angold 1991: 29–30.

Psellos, eventually succeeding him as the Consul of Philosophers. A brash figure lacking Psellos' rhetorical finesse, Italos preferred Aristotle, but his work also reflected the influence of his teacher's Neoplatonism and the expansion of intellectual space that it had achieved. He was condemned in 1082 for, among other things, attempting to comprehend the nature and adoption of Christ with syllogisms and for claiming that the Son both remained in and returned to the Father.⁵³ In attendance at the trial was Italos' student Eustratios of Nicaea, who later contributed to a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* perhaps commissioned by one of Psellos' admirers, Anna Komnene.⁵⁴ In 1117, he too was condemned on similar charges, for suggesting that Christ's humanity was perfected by His return to the Father.⁵⁵ Forty years later, Nicholas of Methone would write an extended refutation of Proklos, which reveals both the vogue Neoplatonism enjoyed among Byzantine intellectuals and the resistance it still faced.⁵⁶ In all of these instances we see the influence of Psellos, who, in spite of his rationalizing threats to Orthodoxy, was referred to as all-wise (*sophotatos*) and highly honored (*hypertimos*) for several generations after his death.⁵⁷ Although his theological suggestions were quickly dismissed, his philosophical sensibility lived on in a series of venturesome Byzantine thinkers from Theodore Metochites to Nikephoros Gregoras to Gemistos Plethon.⁵⁸ In his advocacy for worldly learning and for the radical distinction between discursive thought and mystical experience, Psellos could also be credited with anticipating the Hesychast controversy, the defining event of later Byzantine intellectual history. It is not surprising that his reputation reached the west during the Renaissance even though it was based almost entirely on a falsely attributed work on demonology.⁵⁹

Psellos remains one of the lightning rods of Byzantine studies. Scholars still debate whether his learning reveals a thinker or a dilettante, whether his influence at court was real or imagined, whether his political compromises were acceptable or reprehensible, and whether he was a learned Christian attempting to enrich Orthodoxy with philosophy or a clandestine pagan attempting to subvert it.⁶⁰ To suggest that the answer to each lies somewhere in the middle is not meant to be evasive. The philosophy that challenged his contemporaries also accommodated

⁵³ *Trial of John Italos* 164–171 (pp. 144–145); *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 185–246 (pp. 57–61); see Clucas 1981.

⁵⁴ Frankopan 2009. ⁵⁵ *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 406–411 (pp. 70–71). ⁵⁶ Podskalsky 1976.

⁵⁷ E.g. Glykas, *Annales* 612.1; Zonaras, *Chronicle*, v. 3, 704.6. For Psellos' legacy in the twelfth century, see Magdalino 2002: 382–412; for his reception, see Papaioannou 2012a.

⁵⁸ For his theological impact, see Maltese 1993. ⁵⁹ Hayton 2006.

⁶⁰ For a pagan philosopher, see Kaldellis 1999; 2007: 191–224; Siniossoglou 2011: 71–85. For a Christian dilettante, see Gouillard 1976: 315–324. For someone in between, see Angold 1997: 106–109; Ierodiakonou 2011a.

his ambition. Psellos' critics have always been suspicious of this concurrence, assuming that he could have never reached the highest levels of political power on the strength of his philosophy alone. Since the power over life and death is so much greater than the power over ideas and words, he could have only been at best a manipulator and at worst a pawn of the emperors he served. There is perhaps some truth to this. In spite of his eloquence in claiming that only philosophy can bring order to politics, there is reason to believe that the opposite was at least equally true.⁶¹

When his rival Michael Keroularios fell out of imperial favor, Psellos was enlisted to deliver the charge against him; when the political winds changed a few years later, it was Psellos who delivered his posthumous encomium. He defended his delivery of the charge by saying that the situation had been ambiguous, and he could hardly be blamed for doing an orator's job in arguing for one of its sides.⁶² Psellos was not paid to be a philosopher; he was paid to deliver speeches in service of the emperor and to train others to do the same. In fact, many have argued that his philosophy was little more than a rhetorical enhancement that his rivals at court could not provide. Moreover, his philosophy was ideally suited for the emperor's employ. First, it elevated political activity above both philosophy and rhetoric; second, it focused on the experiences and causation of this world; and finally, and perhaps most importantly, it was essentially amoral.⁶³ The convergence on a regressing middle of correlated extremes allowed for both empty moderation and indifferent, if not ruthless, rationalization. Since ruling the empire had always required more than moderation, Psellos and his philosophy often had little to offer the emperor as he faced the future.⁶⁴ However, as he faced the past, Psellos was willing and able to rationalize the actions that absolute rule sometimes required. No matter how reprehensible these actions might have been, their philosophical analog could go no lower than the non-participating multiplicity of matter, which meant that they too were necessary elements of the world's divine economy.

The rationalization of the deeds of a past emperor might involve criticism, but of a living one it necessarily implied their glorification.⁶⁵ Psellos told the emperor Constantine Monomachos that "I came into the world for books and am in constant conversation with them so that I might acquire sufficient power for your praises."⁶⁶ Psellos aspired above all to be the emperor's encomiast, and his philosophy served that end by suggesting that only an emperor who embraced philosophy could achieve deeds

⁶¹ Psellos, *Oratoria minora* 7. ⁶² Psellos, *Encomium for Keroularios* 370. ⁶³ Kaldellis 1999: 45.

⁶⁴ E.g. his advice to Isaac Komnenos while at war against the Patzinaks was to subdue them by peaceful means with warlike effect: Psellos, *Letter KD* 156 (p. 181.17–31).

⁶⁵ For his distinction between a history and an encomium, see Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.25–27.

⁶⁶ Psellos, *Letter S* 115.

worthy of the highest praise. Even here, his philosophy was what he claimed it to be: two opposites, one higher, the other lower, share an infinitely divisible middle. Because he embraced these opposites and experienced the effect of their middle, Michael Psellos pushed the understanding of human nature toward ambiguity and of rationality toward paradox and in this way opened new ground for intellectual life and expression.

CHAPTER 27

TRIALS OF PHILOSOPHERS AND THEOLOGIAN UNDER THE KOMNENOI

MICHELE TRIZIO

Throughout Byzantine history intellectuals, clergymen, monks, and all sorts of dissenters were put on trial. The eleventh and twelfth centuries are particularly interesting for reconstructing the dynamics behind the trials and condemnations of thinkers of every sort especially because this period reveals the role of the political and ecclesiastic authorities – either in combination or in opposition – in establishing the definition of Orthodoxy.¹ Such trials had begun already in 1029, when the leaders of the non-Chalcedonian Syrian and Armenian churches within the empire began to be interrogated and pressured to change their confession, and in 1054 there appears to have been a formal inquiry into the teaching of the philosopher Michael Psellos. This chapter will concentrate on the subsequent period, under the Komnenoi dynasty. Its trials of intellectuals provided the Komnenoi emperors and the Church with the opportunity to progressively delimit Orthodoxy against various perceived philosophical and heretical threats, regardless of whether the intellectuals put on trial actually espoused the positions condemned. The most significant and relevant trials of this period weave together a fascinating tapestry of events and people: philosophers, spiritual authors, monks, bishops, and religious movements all became, to varying extent, targets of the political and/or ecclesiastical authorities. In fact, important sources of the time, such as Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* and the prologue of Euthymios Zigabenos' *Dogmatic Panoply*, suggest that heresies were rampant in the empire. Although these sources would interpret the emperor's intervention favorably as a reasonable response to a dangerous religious crisis,² they do, nonetheless, occur within a period marked by frequent imperial interventions which aimed to settle dogmatic and religious controversies.³ This chapter presents some illuminating case-studies and then draws some general conclusions.

¹ For an overview, see Browning 1975.

² In the case of both Anna and Zigabenos, the emperor in question is Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), Anna's father and Zigabenos' patron. See Zigabenos, *Dogmatic Panoply*, in *PG* 130:20D–26B.

³ Angold 1995: 45–72; Magdalino 1993a: 368–382.

PHILOSOPHERS

To modern readers the most eye-catching trial of eleventh-century Byzantium was that which led to the condemnation of John Italos in 1082. The sources on Italos' life and career treat him with hostility, often betraying a bias against his southern Italian origins.⁴ The traditional interpretation of the trial, advocated by Joannou, involves Italos' alleged Norman origin and the beginning of the Norman–Byzantine war in 1081.⁵ This interpretation should be abandoned due to the tenuous evidence for Italos' Norman origins. According to Anna's allusive account, Italos migrated from southern Italy to Constantinople, where he became a pupil of Psellos. Apparently, Italos rose to prominence as quickly as he fell. His acquaintance with prominent aristocratic families and the imperial family did not shield him from frequent complaints about his philosophical teaching. In 1077–1078, these complaints led to his first trial under the patriarch Kosmas (1075–1081). Thanks to the emperor's direct intervention, this trial ended in a diplomatic compromise: the Synod condemned nine philosophical theses without explicitly naming Italos.⁶ The verdict, however, apparently satisfied no one and both sides kept seeking official recognition of their respective arguments.

Between February and April 1082, Italos found himself on trial again, this time under the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and a newly proclaimed patriarch, Eustratios Garidas (1081–1084). Unfortunately, Italos could no longer benefit from his previous patrons' influence, since the new political establishment was definitively hostile toward him. The charges against him consisted in the previously condemned nine anathemata and in new charges resulting from an analysis of Italos' profession of faith, alongside a charge of Iconoclasm made by a certain Kaspakes. Moreover, Alexios' hostile *pittakion* (i.e., the emperor's own account of Italos' teaching),⁷ was directly submitted to the Synod for approbation. Alexios' brother, Isaac, was also directly involved in the trial as prosecutor. Despite its questionable authenticity, this new evidence and Alexios' direct involvement led to Italos' condemnation in 1082. Additional anathemata were inserted in the *Synodikon* of the Orthodox Church and associated with Italos explicitly.⁸ The eleven final anathemata mostly condemn, in general terms, philosophical doctrines such as the eternity of matter,

⁴ On Italos, see Rigo 2001. Contemporary witnesses include Anna's *Alexiad*, the early twelfth-century anonymous Lucianesque satire *Timarion*, and a piece written by an otherwise unknown John deacon and master (Gouillard 1981). On the anti-Italos prejudice in these sources, see Hunger 1987.

⁵ Joannou 1956a: 11. ⁶ Grumel 1989: 907.

⁷ Dölger 1925: 1079. Alexios' *pittakion* is the main source behind Anna's account of Italos' teachings in *Alexiad* 8.9.

⁸ Grumel 1989: 923–927. On the trial, see Clucas 1981; Gouillard 1967: 188–202; 1985. For the anathemata, see the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 57.185–61.246

metempsychosis, and the denial of the immortality of the soul. In addition, they condemn the abuse of logical arguments in Christology and the pursuit of Hellenic wisdom for purposes other than erudition. These allegations cannot unambiguously be documented in Italos' extant work and they seem to broadly target ancient Greek philosophy tout-court. Italos' writings, by contrast, support a rather careful approach to sensitive issues such as the origin of matter and the concept of *physis*. In fact, according to Italos all that was written by Hellenic philosophers on these matters is wrong: the only source of truth is the Church Fathers' authority.⁹

THEOLOGIAN, SPIRITUAL AUTHORS, AND MYSTICS

In 1094, a monk known as Neilos gained prominence in Constantinople and, if we are to believe Anna, became acquainted with the Constantinopolitan aristocracy and earned quite a reputation.¹⁰ A native of Calabria in southern Italy, he appears to have promoted a Nestorian and Adoptionist view of Christ's divinization according to which Christ became divine only after the Resurrection as a reward for being virtuous.¹¹ Apparently, he also denied to Mary the title Mother of God (*Theotokos*).¹² Contemporary sources, such as Anna, speak of Neilos as an ignorant monk whose heresy mostly derived from his poor theological terminology. Yet as a consequence of his rising popularity, his alleged Nestorian views caused hostility with the Armenian Monophysites in Constantinople, forcing Alexios to distance himself from Neilos, chastise his views as unorthodox, and call a patriarchal Synod to investigate. As a result, the Synod condemned Neilos and reinforced the teaching of the hypostatic union in Christ.¹³

Immediately after Neilos' condemnation, a deacon at the Church of St. Mary of Blachernai known as Theodore was condemned as heterodox.¹⁴ The documents containing the anathemata against him are now lost, but they are referred to by Niketas of Herakleia (twelfth century),¹⁵ Anna,¹⁶ a twelfth-century heresiological collection,¹⁷ and the references to Theodore's doctrine found in Barlaam the Calabrian's now lost anti-Palamite works.¹⁸ According to this evidence, Theodore was found guilty

⁹ Trizio 2014a. ¹⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 10.1.2. ¹¹ Angold 1995: 477–478.

¹² Gouillard 1967: 202–206.

¹³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 10.1.4–5. For the anathemata against Neilos, see the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 61.247–63.276, and 299–303 (appendix II) for the text of Neilos' abjuration.

¹⁴ Grumel 1989: 961. ¹⁵ Niketas of Herakleia, *Oratio apologetica* 302–304.

¹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 10.1.6. ¹⁷ Gouillard 1978: 19–28, 52–57.

¹⁸ Parts of these works, including the reference to Theodore, are cited and refuted by Gregory Palamas, e.g. *Defense of the Hesychast Saints* 3.1.1 (615); 3.1.7 (621); 3.2.3 (657); 3.2.4 (658–659); 3.3.4 (682).

of “enthusiasm,” a sort of mystical *ekstasis* that radicalized otherwise commonplace positions already present in earlier spiritual literature; he also claimed the privilege of a direct vision of God. If we are to believe Anna, the emperor himself took the first step toward Theodore’s condemnation, which ecclesiastical authorities merely confirmed, despite Theodore’s repentance.¹⁹

Around 1140, another case of unorthodox spirituality attracted the attention of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in particular of the patriarch Leo Styppes (1134–1143). Apparently one Constantine Chrysomallos, a lay preacher who was already dead at the time, had written that baptism was insufficient for entering the authentic Christian life. The proper Christian life can be restored only after the soul penetrates the inner essence of baptism through spiritual baptism. Accordingly, this restoration of true baptism occurs only when mediators usher an adept in through a form of catechesis and transform him in a union with God, in which he perceives God in each of his actions. After Constantine was condemned as an “enthusiast,” a “Bogomil,” and a “Messalian,” his doctrines were anathematized and his writings burned.²⁰ Just as in the case of Theodore, scholars traced the core of Constantine’s doctrines back to Symeon the New Theologian (tenth–eleventh century), to such an extent that Constantine might be the shadow lurking behind some of the texts attributed to Symeon.²¹ Unlike most of the trials in this period, it seems that the emperor did not intervene in this one directly.²²

A REVIVAL OF THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

From 1082 to 1095, the reign of Alexios I witnessed the outbreak of a centuries-old theological controversy, Iconoclasm. The background of this controversy was the first Norman invasion of Byzantium (1081–1085). After unsuccessful military operations at the beginning of the war, the Byzantine army failed to break the Norman siege of Dyrrachion, and the onset of winter forced it to retreat first to Ohrid, then to Thessalonike, and finally to Constantinople.²³ In desperate need of resources to support his troops, Alexios controversially decided to confiscate ecclesiastical property, mostly sacred objects, to produce new coinage for paying the army.²⁴ His

¹⁹ All documents regarding Theodore’s condemnation have been collected and studied by Rigo 2011b.

²⁰ Gouillard 1978: 29–39; Grumel 1989: 1001.

²¹ Gouillard 1973; Angold 1995: 488–490; Bogomilism: Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 212–214, with the caveat by Loos 1974: 96–98.

²² Magdalino 1993a: 276. ²³ Savvides 2007.

²⁴ The episode is mentioned in Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 5.2, who speaks of “a small amount” of such objects. In reconstructing the events relating to the controversy, I follow Thomas 1987. See also Magdalino 1993a: 271–273; Angold 1995: 46–48; Grumel 1946.

decision met with opposition and Leo, metropolitan of Chalcedon, was the most outspoken opponent among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the summer of 1082, Leo wrote a letter to Alexios demanding an official inquiry into the exact amount of confiscated properties. He also called for the resignation of patriarch Eustratios Garidas (1081–1084), who apparently had given his consent to the confiscations.²⁵ In response to Leo's letter, Alexios promised to stop seizing ecclesiastical properties and to later refund the monasteries' losses.²⁶

Failing to satisfy Leo with his promise of repayment, Alexios had to summon an official meeting of the senate to defend his policy and restate his previous promises.²⁷ This tactic, however, only redirected Leo and his fellow opposition toward a different target, the patriarch Eustratios, whom Leo accused of supporting the emperor's policy. Having already resisted one of Leo's attacks on the patriarch, Alexios finally surrendered in 1084. The initial Synod summoned to discuss Leo's allegations had acquitted Eustratios from all charges.²⁸ In July 1084, however, Eustratios resigned to avoid further controversy.²⁹ But this too did not resolve the matter as Leo insisted on an official condemnation of the former patriarch and refused to celebrate the liturgy with the newly appointed Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111).³⁰ After the first phase of the Byzantine–Norman war ended with the death of Robert Guiscard in July 1085, Alexios could devote his attention to the controversy and, this time, he did not forgive Leo for his repeated outrages against imperial authority. In late 1085, Alexios, probably along with his court theologian Eustratios of Nicaea, retaliated by bringing charges against Leo.³¹ The trial documents are obviously biased and present Leo as an incompetent and inconsistent theologian incapable of even defending himself.³² In January 1086, however, Leo asserted that all confiscation and melting of sacred objects were to be considered heretical unless those objects were transformed into others of the same kind.³³ For obvious reasons, this attitude did not help his case. By March, Alexios managed to have him condemned, deposed, and exiled for having refused to accept the 1084 Synod that had acquitted the former patriarch Eustratios Garidas from all charges.³⁴

Two dramatic events then helped Leo and his followers to regain strength: the Pecheneg invasion of 1086 and the alliance between the

²⁵ Leo of Chalcedon, *Letter to the Emperor Alexios Komnenos*.

²⁶ Dölger 1925: 1085; Grumel 1944. ²⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.3.

²⁸ Sakkélion 1878: 116.14–20. Apparently Eustratios had asked the emperor to defend his views before a synod; Grumel 1989: 932.

²⁹ Grumel 1989: 937. ³⁰ Sakkélion 1878: 117.

³¹ On the theoretical basis of the debate between Eustratios and Leo, see Barber 2007: 99–157.

³² Sakkélion 1878: 120–123. This prejudice toward Leo is reflected in Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 5.2.

³³ Sakkélion 1878: 123.23–124.7. ³⁴ *Ibid.* 124–126; Grumel 1941: 338–340.

Pechenegs and the emir of Smyrna, Tzachas, in 1091. In both these circumstances, and in spite of his earlier promises, Alexios was again forced to seize ecclesiastical properties, including lands. With Leo in exile, Alexios' most prominent opponent became John Oxeites, patriarch of Antioch.³⁵ John composed his manifesto against the confiscation, known as *De monasteriis*, after 1090. In this text, John defends Leo's understanding of all requisition as impious and goes on to demand the abolition of the *charistike*, the practice of entrusting the properties of monasteries to lay supervision when these were ruined or badly administered, along with the obligation to restore these properties and the privilege of appropriating part of their incomes. As a consequence, the support for Leo at the court and in the ecclesiastical hierarchy grew again, to such an extent that Alexios considered forgiving the dissident Leo if he would drop his earlier views on the status of sacred objects.³⁶ A reconciliation took place in 1094 in a synod held at the Blachernai palace.³⁷ This renewed harmony between the emperor and his critics opened the way to a moderate reform of the *charistike*.³⁸

CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES

The condemnation of Eustratios, the metropolitan of Nicaea, in 1117, exposed a rift between the emperor and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The emperor played an active role in the condemnation of both John Italos and Neilos of Calabria, but he could not intervene during Eustratios' case. His reluctance may be partially explained by the fact that Eustratios was a protégé of Alexios, a court theologian, who accompanied Alexios to Philippopolis in 1114 to discuss theological matters with the "Manicheans" there (i.e. the Paulicians).³⁹ Eustratios' strong ties with the Komnenoi can also be seen in his acquaintance with princess Anna Komnene, to whom he dedicated his commentaries on books 1 and 6 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. These powerful relationships, however, failed to overshadow his other, controversial past relationship: Eustratios was a pupil of John Italos. Although during Italos' trial Eustratios had distanced himself from his former master, his later opponents – in particular Niketas of Herakleia – pointed to Eustratios' acquaintance with Italos as further evidence of heterodoxy.⁴⁰ The charges against Eustratios had little to do with those against John Italos, as Eustratios' lapses concerned Christological matters specifically, rather than broad philosophical teachings. Only once do the

³⁵ See the documents collected by Gautier 1970. ³⁶ Grumel 1989: 965–966. ³⁷ Gautier 1971.

³⁸ Thomas 1987: 204–206. ³⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 14.8.

⁴⁰ Niketas of Herakleia, *Oratio apologetica* 304.7. For the Aristotelian commentaries, see Chapter 23.

anathemata against Eustratios concern philosophy, accusing him of abusing Aristotelian logic to the point of being led to errors in Christology (a commonplace accusation since the early Christological debates). In particular, Eustratios was accused of misconceiving the human nature of Christ as inferior to the divine one.⁴¹ On 26 April 1117, Eustratios publicly repented before the emperor, the Synod, and the senate, but neither his late repentance, nor his patron the emperor, could protect him from being anathematized and deposed.⁴²

Soterichos Panteugenos, a deacon at Hagia Sophia and patriarch-elect of Antioch, was tried and found guilty in 1156–1157, providing another case-study of a Christological heresy trial. As most of our knowledge of his doctrines comes from his opponents, of whom the most notable was Nicholas, bishop of Methone, and from the official documents of his condemnation, and not from Soterichos' own writings, we can safely assume a bias. The background for the trial that led to his downfall centers on the prayer of the Byzantine *euchologion*, "You are the one who receives and is distributed," which implies that Christ's sacrifice was offered not only to the Father but also to the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity being indivisible.⁴³ Soterichos composed a dialogue arguing that Christ's sacrifice was offered to the Father alone, and on this matter endorsed the same view as Nikephoros Basilakes and Michael, the master of the rhetors and teacher of the Gospel.⁴⁴ Being asked in 1156 to justify his position before a Synod, Soterichos composed a defense demanding to present his views to the emperor. Apparently, on 12 May 1157 the Synod guided by emperor Manuel I (1143–1180) at the Blachernai palace managed to convince Soterichos to acknowledge his mistake, although this late repentance did not save him from losing his ecclesiastical office.⁴⁵

Manuel's openness to the papacy and the west forms the background for the controversy over the verse "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).⁴⁶ The events in question are reported by both Byzantine and Latin sources, including the historians John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates⁴⁷ and the

⁴¹ The dossier against Eustratios has been edited by Joannou (1954b; 1958).

⁴² Joannou 1952; Darrouzès 1966. The anathemata against him survive in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 70.404–420, and have been studied by Gouillard (1967: 206–210). All documents concerning the trial are described in Grumel 1989: 1002–1003b.

⁴³ *Acta synodica de dogmate cuius auctor fuit Panteuegenus Soterichus*, in *PG* 140:177–202. The anathemata against Soterichos were introduced in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 73.424–74.471.

⁴⁴ Soterichos Panteugenos, *Dialogus cum Philone*, in *PG* 140:137–147.

⁴⁵ Beck 1959: 623–624; Gouillard 1967: 210–215; Magdalino 1993a: 279–281; Angold 1995: 160–161; Felmy 2011: 218–219.

⁴⁶ On Manuel's western policy, see Magdalino 1993a: 40–103. A summary of the controversy and its relevance to the *Synodikon* is found in Gouillard 1967: 216–226.

⁴⁷ Kinnamos, *History* 6.2; Niketas Choniates, *Treasury of Orthodoxy* 15. On Niketas' problematic approach to the events, see Simpson 2013: 44–45.

scholar and Latin diplomat Hugo Eteriano.⁴⁸ All our sources for this controversy identify Demetrios of Lampe's report of his discussion with Peter of Vienna in Germany as the real *casus belli*.⁴⁹ Demetrios reported that the Latins interpreted John 14:28 to mean that Christ in his human nature was inferior to the Father. As a result of his pro-western policy, Manuel sided with the Latins and caused a fracture within the Byzantine clergy. Whereas the patriarch and a few important bishops supported the emperor, the rest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy opposed Manuel. Since Manuel's position harkened back to that of the Latin Hugo Eteriano, it is easy to see the controversy as a sounding-board for the broader tension between Byzantium and the west, and as expressing internal opposition to Manuel's open-minded approach to these matters.⁵⁰

The first phase of the controversy saw Manuel submitting the whole issue to a Synod on 2 March 1166.⁵¹ Playing an active role in the Synod, Manuel imposed a compromise that proclaimed both the unity of Christ's dual nature and the individual integrity of each, without tackling the issue of the correct interpretation of John 14:28 directly.⁵² However, things did not go as smoothly as the emperor had hoped. Right from the beginning, Manuel's compromise was not accepted by the *skeuophylax* John Pantechnes and others, who, nonetheless, did ultimately (and reluctantly) accept Manuel's standpoints.⁵³ But this was not the end. Manuel's determination did not suffice to stop opposition to what must have appeared as a concession to the Latins. Basil Hagiopaulites, a teacher of St. Paul's, was condemned on 24 January 1168, for opposing the doctrine established in 1166.⁵⁴

Only after the death of patriarch Luke Chrysoberges in late 1169 did Manuel's opponents strike back and revive their complaints, with Constantine of Kerkyra and the *begoumen* John Eirenikos leading the charge. Constantine challenged the doctrine established in 1166, and even accused Luke of heresy for supporting Manuel's view.⁵⁵ But Constantine was then condemned in three different synods (23 January and 20 and 21 February 1170), which took place under the newly appointed

⁴⁸ Hugo's report on the controversy is edited by Dondaine 1958: 473–483; see Häring 1962. On his biography, see Dondaine 1952; Rigo 2005.

⁴⁹ On this Byzantine diplomat, see *ODB* 605.

⁵⁰ On the reverberation of east–west debates under Manuel, see Bucossi 2012; Sidéris 2012; Kolbaba 2001; and Chapter 28.

⁵¹ On the history of the controversy, see Classen 1955; Dondaine 1958; Mango 1963; Sakkos 1968; Thetford 1987; Magdalino 1993a: 287–292.

⁵² Cf. the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 75.472–77.509. Manuel himself prepared a dossier collecting the proceedings of the Synod and Manuel's point of view known as *Ekthesis*. See Grumel 1989: 1075; Magdalino 1993a: 287–288. On Manuel's doctrinal standpoint in 1166, see Gouillard 1967: 219–220.

⁵³ Grumel 1989: 1063, 1064, 1067. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 1077.

⁵⁵ A list of dissidents in the Synod of 1166, including Niketas of Maroneia, is found in *ibid.* 1064.

patriarch Michael III Anchialos.⁵⁶ The anathemata against him were added to the *Synodikon*.⁵⁷ Eirenikos suffered the same fate. In February 1170, he was questioned for opposing the Synod of 1166, but escaped condemnation after acknowledging his errors and asking for forgiveness.⁵⁸ Apparently no one believed his sincerity. He was condemned in 1170–1171, together with others who were found guilty of reading Eirenikos' writing without reprobation,⁵⁹ and the anathemata against him were duly added to the *Synodikon*.⁶⁰

This controversy shows how difficult it was for the emperor to permanently impose himself on the ecclesiastical hierarchy in religious matters. Even after the condemnations of Constantine and John (and after Manuel's death in 1180), at least two later attempts were made to challenge the Synod of 1166 and the part of the *Synodikon* concerning the controversy. At one point, the emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1183–1185) was even forced to stop a debate on the subject between John Kinnamos and Euthymios of Neopatra.⁶¹ More importantly, an attempt to reopen the debate occurred under Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195). To avoid a devastating schism in the Church, the emperor was forced to silence the enemies of the Synod of 1166.⁶²

DUALIST HERESIES

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Paulicians and Bogomils were endemic in the Balkans and proved to be resilient and hard to eradicate. In 970, the emperor John Tzimiskes (969–976) relocated many thousands of Paulicians from Armenia to Philippopolis, in Bulgaria, intending to use them as mercenaries. The Paulicians, however, resisted conversion and proved to be unreliable allies.⁶³ While they were unremittingly problematic on the northern border of the empire, the situation came to a head in 1114 when the theologian Eustratios of Nicaea accompanied Alexios I to Philippopolis to tackle the situation directly. This was exacerbated by the rise, around the end of the tenth century, of Bogomilism.⁶⁴

This religious movement was the target of a major trial under the reign of Alexios I. It is difficult to fairly reconstruct its doctrinal standpoint due to the bias of the Byzantine sources,⁶⁵ and, on the other, the lack of authentic Bogomil sources apart from later compendia that circulated in

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 1109. ⁵⁷ *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 77.510–81.561. ⁵⁸ Grumel 1989: 1110.

⁵⁹ *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* 81.562–571. ⁶⁰ Grumel 1989: 1115–1117.

⁶¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 331.92–94.

⁶² Gouillard 1967: 223–224. For an evaluation of the controversy with regard to Manuel's policy, see Angold 1995: 85–87.

⁶³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories* 286. ⁶⁴ For an introduction, see Obolensky 1948.

⁶⁵ Collected and discussed in Detkova 2008: 49–55.

Latin and among the Cathars.⁶⁶ The early Byzantine witnesses include a letter to tsar Peter of Bulgaria (927–969) sent by the patriarch Theophylaktos Lakapenos (933–956),⁶⁷ and a later tract on the Bogomils written by Kosmas the Priest. This latter witness differs from that of Theophylaktos in so far as Kosmas appears to report first-hand information.⁶⁸ Afterwards, in the mid-eleventh century, a work of Euthymios of the Periblepton documents the Bogomils' presence in Asia Minor.⁶⁹ Euthymios' work is important because some versions of the anathemata against the Bogomils in the *Synodikon* rely on it.⁷⁰ Another testimony is that of the dialogue *On the Operations of Demons* formerly attributed to Psellos. This text provides only second-hand information but identifies Bogomilism as a kind of Messalianism (as was common in Byzantine sources).⁷¹ Finally, the letter of the patriarch Kosmas (1075–1081) to the bishop of Larissa contains twelve anathemata against the Bogomils that were later incorporated into the *Synodikon* of the tsar Boril (1211).⁷²

The most important Byzantine texts on Bogomilism concern the trial of the Bogomil Basil under Alexios I: Anna's *Alexiad*⁷³ and Euthymios Zigabenos' *Dogmatic Panoply*. The trial took place before 1111 – possibly even before 1104, when Isaac *sebastokrator*, Alexios' brother who took an active role in interrogating Basil, died – and resulted in Basil being condemned and burned alive.⁷⁴ Although confusing the chronology of events, Anna offers a vivid account of Basil's trial and makes it clear that her father, the emperor, was closely involved. Anna speaks of Bogomilism as a new heresy combining Paulicianism and Manicheism with Messalianism. Her account suggests that Bogomilism had likely already spread in Constantinople, which would explain the emperor's concern. According to the *Alexiad*, Alexios managed to invite the alleged chief of the Bogomil movement to court. Then, while disguising his real intentions, he managed

⁶⁶ Turdeanu 1950. All relevant literature on these documents has been collected and discussed in Detkova 2008: 46–49. See also Loos 1974: 78–83.

⁶⁷ Dujčev 1964; an English translation in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 98–102. The most important Byzantine and Slavonic sources on Bogomilism are listed and discussed in Detkova 2008: 49–54.

⁶⁸ On this text, see Detkova 2008: 50–51; an English translation in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 114–134.

⁶⁹ Edition in Ficker 1908; an English translation in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 142–164. Ficker's edition must be critically reviewed in the light of the observations of Rigo 2015.

⁷⁰ Gouillard 1967: 228–237; Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 134–140.

⁷¹ Since this attribution is probably false, the chronology of the text remains problematic: Gautier 1980, who dates the text to the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries.

⁷² Text edited and studied in Gouillard 1970; see Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 165–166.

⁷³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 15.9–10; also Zonaras, *Historical Summary* 18.23.

⁷⁴ Grumel 1989: 988–989. The trial took place under patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111).

to obtain a confession from him, who apparently was unaware that the senate and a Church synod were hiding behind a curtain. Anna's account dramatically depicts the execution of Basil in the *tzyganisterion* (the polo racetrack) and – unsurprisingly, given the apologetic nature of the *Alexiad* – Alexios' indulgent sparing of the other prisoners' lives, who were jailed and forced to repent.⁷⁵

Even more important than Anna's account is the account by the early twelfth-century court-theologian Euthymios Zigabenos. During the trial, Euthymios examined Basil, and the emperor asked Euthymios to compose the *Dogmatic Panoply*, a work devoted to the refutation of all heresies: it includes a chapter with first-hand information on Bogomilism.⁷⁶ Before composing the *Panoply*, Euthymios had also composed another account (the *Narratio*) of the Bogomil heresy, which formed the basis for the *Panoply*. Both contain crucial information on Bogomilism (its dualist beliefs, customs, and opposition to ecclesiastic institutions and sacraments), including excerpts from the Bogomil commentary on Matthew, a document of exceptional importance for reconstructing their doctrines.⁷⁷

After Basil's trial, at least four other controversial episodes evolved into trials against the Bogomils. The first is an otherwise obscure episode referred to by the canonist and bishop of Antioch Theodore Balsamon (d. after 1195). In his commentary on the *Nomokanon*, Balsamon refers to a Constantinopolitan synod (whose documents are lost) held under the patriarch Michael II (1143–1146), which condemned several Bogomils to be burned at the stake.⁷⁸ The second and more problematic episode concerns two Cappadocian bishops, Leontios of Balbissa and Clement of Sasima, who at the beginning of the reign of Manuel were deposed for uncanonical ordination and were charged with promoting issues associated with Bogomilism. These included sexual abstinence, Iconoclasm, heretical burial practices, and irregularities in ordaining deaconesses.⁷⁹ At nearly the same time, in late 1143, a monk called Niphon was also charged with Bogomilism. The episode is obscure, but it probably relates to the condemnation of the two Cappadocian bishops as Bogomil. Apparently Niphon had composed a letter defending the two bishops and accusing the contemporary ecclesiastic establishment of heresy. Initially, the synod

⁷⁵ Anna's account has been translated and commented on in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 175–180. On the trial, see Angold 1995: 485–487.

⁷⁶ Zigabenos, *Dogmatic Panoply*, in *PG* 130:1298–1333. See also Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 15.9.

⁷⁷ Selected excerpts from the *Panoply* and the *Narratio* have been translated by Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 180–207.

⁷⁸ Balsamon, *Scholia on Photios' Nomokanon*, in *PG* 104:976–1218, here 1111; trans. in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 215. See Grumel 1989: 1020.

⁷⁹ The documents of the trial of Leontios and Clement have been edited and studied by Gouillard 1978: 39–43, 68–81. See also Grumel 1989: 1011, 1012, 1014. A partial English translation can be found in Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 215–219.

forced him only to solitary retirement in the monastery of Periblepton and called for further investigation. However, in February 1144, the synod condemned Niphon to perennial and complete seclusion.⁸⁰ The fourth episode concerns the newly elected patriarch Kosmas II Atticus (1146–1147). Kosmas was himself charged with Bogomilism for dismissing the accusations against Niphon. He was condemned in February 1147 by a synod convened at the Blachernai palace. To be fair, scholars agree that the condemnation of the two Cappadocian bishops, Niphon and Kosmas, has little to do with historical Bogomilism and reflects more the conflict between different factions within the ecclesiastical establishment of the time than a real Bogomil threat.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

All trials discussed here share some similar characteristics that allow us to draw some conclusions on the dynamics behind them. The first important feature is the role of the emperor. He is almost always involved personally in the controversies. In some instances, such as the case of John Italos (1082), he took the initiative in summoning a synod. He was on the frontline when facing the Bogomil threat. On other occasions, such as in the case of the “Father is greater than I” controversy (1166), the emperor was one of the authorities directly involved in the debate. In the case of the debate with Leo of Chalcedon (between 1082 and 1094), the emperor represented the prerogatives of the state and imperial power vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, the emperor did not always succeed in imposing his will. He often met with strong resistance from members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The debate over the status of sacred objects was one such case. Here both the emperor and the patriarch struggled to maintain peace in the Church as Leo’s supporters were advocating for the reform of the *charistike*. The same holds as true for Manuel and his westernizing policy. When trying to impose his view on the formula in John 14:28, the emperor met with the greatest resistance from the clergy at all levels.

The fruits of this unusually high number of trials is reflected in the many additions made to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* in this period. The *Synodikon* lists heresies, heretics, and heretical or pagan ideas condemned after the seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, and thereby defines Orthodoxy. As such it is a document of the utmost importance for defining the limits of acceptable intellectual activity in Byzantium, but nonetheless it should be read with caution as a source for reconstructing heretical doctrines philologically. In many instances the text in the

⁸⁰ Grumel 1989: 1013, 1015. ⁸¹ Magdalino 1993a: 284–285; Angold 1995: 491.

Synodikon does not match with our knowledge of facts and ideas; or it addresses issues only in general terms, without delving into details. It immortalizes and fixes Orthodoxy as a coherent whole. The same ideas apply to three important works addressing heresy in this period: the *Dogmatic Panoply* composed by the monk Euthymios Zigabenos at the request of emperor Alexios I; the *Sacred Arsenal* composed by Andronikos Kamateros under Manuel, and finally the later *Treasury of Orthodoxy* by Niketas Choniates. As these works were composed at the request of emperors, they might be considered the secular counterparts of the *Synodikon*. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that two of these writers, Kamateros and Choniates, were also high-ranking imperial officials.⁸²

The facts, people, and ideas condemned under the Komnenoi were diverse. First, there is Italos. For modern interpreters, who believe in intellectual freedom as an inalienable value, Italos' condemnation often stands for the conservative and repressive nature of Byzantine society, targeting the autonomy of reason. However, for the Byzantines Italos' trial and its implications seem to have been a minor event when compared with the many other known trials in this period. The latter related strictly to theological problems and did not involve philosophy directly. Specifically theological problems were simply more relevant or pressing.

Moreover, when we look at the events closely we observe a variety of facts, ideas, and doctrines, which can hardly be reconciled with the monolithic picture painted by the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*. The condemnations of Neilos of Calabria, Theodore of Blachernai, and Constantine Chrysomallos reveal to a certain extent a diffidence toward theological vocabulary which is more or less connected with the writings of Symeon the New Theologian. Yet, Neilos is no Chrysomallos, just as the latter differed from Theodore. These thinkers should therefore be studied on their own by avoiding generalizations. And the political implications of the events discussed here are not always easy to pinpoint. In two instances, these are more or less evident: the condemnation of Leo and the "Father is greater than I" controversy. In the first case, Alexios was in desperate need of financial resources for supporting his troops, but had to face strong resistance from many members of the higher and lower clergy, who defended Leo as a way to reform the system of the *charistike* and the secular privileges that it granted over church property. In the case of the controversy over John 14:28, the courtly and ecclesiastic opposition to Manuel reflects the growing hostility toward the emperor's westernizing policy.

⁸² Magdalino 1993a: 316–320.

All in all, the large number of trials that took place between the late eleventh and twelfth centuries shows, on the one hand, the attempt by the emperor and the clergy to impose their dogmatic control over intellectual life. On the other, the chronic recurrence of dissidence made it difficult, if not impossible, to exercise a permanent control over monks, intellectuals, and theologians. In other words, when facing this record of trials one could interpret the data the other way around, i.e. as the sign of the vitality, rather than the static nature, of Byzantine intellectual life.

PART V
PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN LATE
BYZANTIUM

CHAPTER 28
THEOLOGICAL DEBATES WITH THE
WEST, 1054–1300

TIA KOLBABA

Greek theologians were not always obsessed with the theology and liturgy of the Latin-speaking churches of western Europe. They became obsessed during two centuries of increasing contact and conflict between eastern and western Christians (c. 1050–1250). Even to list the instances of discussion, denunciation, and (occasionally) appreciation of Latin theology in this period would take us far beyond the mandate of an introductory volume on Byzantine intellectual history.¹ Instead of a survey-cum-list, then, I aim in this chapter to illuminate the two most important themes that have emerged from the many detailed studies of debates, dialogues, and literary exchanges between Greeks and Latins in the period from around 1150 to around 1300. To do so, I will discuss three historical moments in detail, hoping the reader will accept my claim that they exemplify broader trends.

The two themes are as follows: First, Greek judgments about Latin culture in general, and Latin theological acumen in particular, evolved. The justifiable sense of cultural superiority that characterized the middle Byzantine period (c. 800–1080) began to crumble in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the Latin world experienced not only economic and demographic expansion but also a flowering of philosophy and theology unprecedented in western history. In constant contact with westerners in this period, Byzantines noticed – sometimes reluctantly – growing Latin sophistication and confidence, even as they could not separate intellectual developments in the west from the west’s growing military and economic might. The second theme of this chapter is how interaction between Greeks and Latins exemplifies intercultural dialogue more generally. Each side usually failed to address the real and substantive arguments of the other, as polemic and point-scoring usually triumphed over any prolonged effort to understand. Even more important than these universal features of polemic, however, is the degree to which each side’s history and experience confounded even the most well-intentioned and open-minded discussants. Often what the modern observer initially sees as

¹ Beck 1959 is still the most useful survey of the texts from a given period.

a straightforward and minor theological or liturgical difference proves to have deep historical roots; it further complicates matters that these historical roots are seldom explicitly acknowledged, or even recognized, by the combatants.

MIDDLE BYZANTINE CONDESCENSION – 1054 AND BEYOND

We begin in a traditional fashion – in Constantinople in 1054. A papal legate, incensed at the disrespect shown to his delegation by the patriarch of Constantinople, deposits a bull excommunicating the patriarch on the high altar of Hagia Sophia during the midday service. The patriarch responds not only by convening a synod and excommunicating the legate but also by writing a letter in which he details more than twenty errors of the Latin Church, ranging from the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist to the silken vestments of bishops and the eating of unclean things.² This drama has made 1054 the date most commonly cited for the definitive divorce of the eastern Orthodox from the Roman Catholic Church; textbooks, survey histories, and Wikipedia continue the tradition; journalists reporting on papal visits to eastern Orthodox countries naturally repeat what the textbooks say. This chapter, however, begins in 1054 for a different reason: not only was the year characterized by the recriminations, excommunications, and self-serving accounts of the papal legate and his patriarchal adversary; it also saw the response of Peter III, patriarch of Antioch (1052–1056), to patriarch Michael Keroularios' (1043–1058) accusations against the Latins.

Peter of Antioch's response to Keroularios exemplifies a more irenic and traditional response to religious difference than Keroularios' screeds, a recognition that some differences between the Churches might be important but that most were matters of indifference.³ Peter's letter also deserves attention for what it reveals about his opinion of the inferiority of Latin culture in general. Latin errors in doctrine or practice, he suggests, resulted from the collapse of the Roman empire in the west, the barbarian invasions, and even a lack of good record-keeping. Responding to the multitude of accusations that Keroularios brings against the Latins, Peter urges brotherly tolerance rooted in condescension: "For they are our brothers, even if it happens that, through rusticity and lack of education, they have frequently fallen from what is seemly, following their own will. And we do not demand the same accuracy in barbarous peoples as we demand among those who have been brought up in doctrine."⁴ The Latin

² Keroularios, *Letter to Peter, Patriarch of Antioch*, col. 789–792; tr. of list in Kolbaba 2000: 232–234.

³ Peter III, *Letter to Michael Keroularios*. See Kolbaba 2000: 88–101; 2006; Sicienski 2010: 115–116.

⁴ Peter III, *Letter to Keroularios* 805–806.

change to the Nicene Creed⁵ can be explained by their loss of “their exemplar of the First Council of Nicaea because the race of the Vandals ruled Rome for a long time.”⁶ This kind of Greek condescension vis-à-vis Latin culture went back to the classical period, but more relevant for our purposes is the prominence of such disdain in the middle Byzantine period (c. 843–c. 1081). The emperor Michael III (842–867) famously insulted pope Nicholas I (858–867) by referring to Latin as a barbaric, Scythic language.⁷ The patriarch Photios (858–867, 877–886) speculated in a letter to a western archbishop that the Latin addition to the Creed may have come from men who “are not well-trained in the words of the Lord” or who lacked an accurate record of the Ecumenical Councils and their teachings.⁸ Writing at the end of the eleventh century, the archbishop Theophylaktos of Ohrid repeated the by-now-traditional explanation for Latin “error” in the matter of the *filioque*: the Latin language was just not sufficiently versatile to distinguish the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father within the godhead from the sending of the Spirit by the Son in the economy of salvation. Whereas Greek has many words for coming-forth, being-sent, coming-out-of, and so on, Latin’s impoverished vocabulary must use the single word *procedere* for all.⁹ In whatever form – hostile, charitable, contemptuous – the attitude of the Byzantines well into the eleventh century was based on a secure, even arrogant, sense of their own cultural superiority to westerners.

This attitude was going to change during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Whereas there was some foundation for the Byzantine sense of intellectual superiority in the early Middle Ages, Latin advances in education began to undermine that foundation in the eleventh century. To give only a few illustrative examples: in the history of western philosophy, the twelfth century begins with Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109), reaches its midpoint with Peter Abelard (c. 1079–1130) and Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160), and ends shortly before the death of Moses Maimonides (c. 1135–1204). Beyond high philosophy, the twelfth century is an era of religious creativity, legal scholarship, Church reform, monastic experimentation, architectural innovation, and crusades. Byzantines did not immediately become aware of these developments, but over the course of the

⁵ The history of how the Latins came to add a phrase to the Creed – “The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son* [Latin: *filioque*]” – and the resulting debates between Greeks and Latins about the procession of the Holy Spirit are detailed in Siecienski 2010.

⁶ Peter III, *Letter to Keroularios* 803–804. ⁷ Pope Nicholas I, *Letter to Emperor Michael III* 459.

⁸ Photios, *To the Archbishop of Aquileia* = *Letter* 291 (v. 3).

⁹ Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Concerning Those who Accuse the Latins*. On this distinction between the theological/eternal relationship between the Holy Spirit and the other persons in the godhead, on the one hand, and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other persons in the economy of salvation, see Siecienski 2010: 33–45, 51–62.

century they began to recognize that the west was not the land of darkness and barbarism they had been picturing.

Moreover, Byzantines could not overlook changes in the west because the eleventh through thirteenth centuries saw an exponential increase in contacts between them. Between 1054 and 1274, the imperial government in Byzantium was continually involved in negotiations with Latin powers: the papacy, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Normans in southern Italy, the crusaders passing through the empire, the crusaders in the crusader states, the mercantile city-states of Italy, and more. As the centuries passed, contact between Greeks and Latins spread far beyond the imperial court. Latins traveled to the east in greater numbers and stayed there for longer periods. Venetians and Amalfitans had trading privileges and quarters in Constantinople from the eleventh century on; Pisans gained similar privileges in 1112 and the Genoese in 1170.¹⁰ Starting with the First Crusade, crusaders established Frankish states in the Levant, and those states dealt with the empire in Constantinople as allies, enemies, trading partners, and sometimes dependants.¹¹ Between 1204 and 1261, Latins directly ruled the capital city of the Byzantine empire; and from 1204 on they ruled much of the Peloponnese.¹² Cyprus they had acquired already in 1191.

In such circumstances, awareness of religious differences between Greeks and Latins grew apace, and with awareness came debate and conversation. We know a considerable amount about some of these discussions. In general, some were public and recorded in histories of the period; many have extant texts connected to them. Other conversations left traces but no texts. For example, around 1070 a certain Laycus of Amalfi wrote a letter in which he claimed that he had heard “from many of our fellow citizens and others” that the Latins in Constantinople were “frequently” under attack from the Greeks, who sought to persuade the Latins to give up unleavened wafers in the Eucharist and “offer leavened bread in the sacrifice, as is their custom.”¹³ Around 1110, Eustratios of Nicaea, inspired by contact with Latin clergy in the capital, wrote treatises on the procession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Later in the twelfth century, Anselm of Havelberg not only publicly debated with a prominent Byzantine theologian but also “had many discussions and meetings – some private,

¹⁰ The bibliography on the role of the Italian mercantile states in Byzantine history is immense. The following are good places to begin: Lilie 1984; HENDY 1970; 1989; JACOBY 1994.

¹¹ Lilie 1993. ¹² Jacoby 1999.

¹³ Michel 1939 for origins, author, and dating of the text; 35–47 for the text of the letter; quotation from 35–36.

¹⁴ In his account of the debates between a Latin archbishop and several Byzantines in 1112, Eustratios mentions that he had written two treatises on the procession of the Holy Spirit before the archbishop came to town. I assume he did so because he was challenged on the issue and not out of purely academic interest: Eustratios, *Refutation of the Argument before the Lord Emperor Alexios Komnenos against Grossolanos, Archbishop of Milan, Concerning the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 84.

some public, with Latins or with Greeks – about these doctrinal and ritual matters.”¹⁵ The growing sophistication of Latin thought revealed by this constant contact began to change Byzantine attitudes toward Latin culture.

This complicates matters for us too. While generalizations can be made about the early and middle Byzantine tendency to dismiss Latins as unwashed barbarians, from the late eleventh century onward Byzantine responses are more varied and mutable. Much depends upon the contexts in which Greeks and Latins meet (or read one another’s work, in translation or not); the attitudes of the individual scholars involved; the sponsor of any sort of debate and his desires; and the power dynamics at work (Latins ruling Greek populations, for example). Furthermore, most accounts of debates are too tendentious to be very useful as historical sources. Fortunately, there is one example of Greeks and Latins discussing an important theological issue at length for which we have extant accounts from several perspectives.

THE IMPORTATION OF A LATIN THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY (1160S)

Between 1160 and 1166, a theological controversy preoccupied many Church leaders and imperial courtiers in Constantinople. Its main subject was the proper understanding of Jesus’ statement “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). The controversy was put to rest by a decision of the standing synod in 1166. Although it will sometimes be necessary to dip a toe into the deep waters of theological explanation, the precise theological content of the synod’s decision is not my primary concern here.¹⁶ Instead, I am interested in what this controversy reveals about westerners, Byzantines, and theology in the twelfth century, for while the synodal records give the illusion of a clear case of erroneous understanding and a purely internal conflict, other sources show that contact with western theologians played an important role in this controversy. The sources available are as follows: the synodal records of 1166; a Latin translation of the synodal canons and confessions; results of the Synod found in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*; Hugo Eteriano’s account in a letter written after

¹⁵ Anselm of Havelberg, *Dialogues* 1.28. On the public debates, see Lees 1998: 6–7, 40–47; Russell 1979.

¹⁶ The synodal records are in Mai 1831: 1–96. Most of the records also appear as part of Niketas Choniates’ *Treasury of Orthodoxy*. The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, which is part of the Church services for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, contains several paragraphs related to the Synod of 1166, praising those who hold the correct doctrine and anathematizing those who do not: Gouillard 1967: 74–77, 216–226. A summary of the positions accepted and rejected by the Synod can be found in Classen 1955: 355–356. Classen also uses the theological content of the Synod’s canons, combined with knowledge of the Christological controversy in the west, to assess the roles of various players in the controversy. What follows depends upon Classen’s analysis.

the Synod, backed up by a brief reference in a text by Hugo's brother Leo Tuscus; an account in the history of John Kinnamos; a substantially different account in the history of Niketas Choniates; two marble tablets excavated near Hagia Sophia in Istanbul; two brief references in orations by Eustathios of Thessalonike; two references in a Salzburg manuscript (obscure and difficult to interpret, but conclusively shown to be intertwined with the others by P. Classen, whose work was supplemented by Dondaine's discovery of Hugo's letter).¹⁷

All of these sources agree that the controversy concerned the exegesis of John 14:28, that the emperor took the lead in resolving the controversy, and that a series of meetings of the synod, held in 1166, confirmed the imperial opinion and condemned those who disagreed.¹⁸ Beyond that, however, the sources are at best confused and at times contradictory. Kinnamos, a civil servant whose *History* generally lionizes the emperor, tells the story as follows: Around 1160, a man named Demetrios from Lampe in Asia Minor returned from "the land of the Germans," where he had been sent on an imperial mission. In conversation with the emperor, Demetrios affirmed that the westerners were holding an obviously erroneous opinion about the union of God and man in Jesus Christ: "They dare to say that the same Person [Christ] is inferior and equal to the God who engendered Him." Far from agreeing with Demetrios, however, the emperor expressed agreement with the Latin position Demetrios had criticized. When Demetrios circulated a treatise in which he continued to criticize the idea that Christ could be both inferior and equal to the Father, Manuel ordered him to desist. Demetrios did not, and the controversy grew. Manuel tried to persuade important clerics in the capital to adopt his view and to oppose Demetrios, then produced "numerous books which spoke clearly in regard to this, and put the matter up for synodal investigation." At the Synod, Manuel's interpretation was affirmed and Demetrios' condemned. "Then, after having inscribed the text in stone, they speedily placed it in Hagia Sophia on the left as one enters."¹⁹

What exactly is the role of westerners and western theology in this account? According to Kinnamos, Demetrios' error came from the west. A poorly educated man who dabbled in theology, he "returned from [his missions to the west] full of drivel." But Kinnamos does not claim that

¹⁷ Hugo Eteriano's account is in Dondaine 1958. Leo Tuscus' reference to his brother's role in the crisis is in the *Preface to the Oneirocriticon*. Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos* 6.2 (tr. Brand 189–193). Choniates, *History* 211–213 (tr. Magoulias 120–121). The marble tablets: Mango 1963. Eustathios mentions the controversy in two places: *Speech to the Emperor Manuel Komnenos* 48–49; *Funeral Oration for Manuel Komnenos* 205. The Salzburg texts are ed. in Classen 1955: 364–368.

¹⁸ By this I do not mean that each source mentions all of these facts; rather, most mention them and none contradicts them.

¹⁹ Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos* 6.1–2 (tr. Brand 189–193). On the inscription, see Mango 1963.

Demetrios adopted an erroneous western position and promoted it; on the contrary, Demetrios opposes the western position and Manuel supports it. So Demetrios' crime is not that he adopted western ideas; rather, the disease he caught in the west was an inability to "leave off meddling about the nature of God." In Kinnamos' account, Manuel does not use western theology. All in all, Kinnamos sees a controversy imported from the west, but once it arrives in Byzantium it becomes an internal matter, settled in time-honored ways. That Manuel agrees with a western opinion is certainly not stressed. Hugo Eteriano, a Latin theologian who was at the imperial court, agrees with Kinnamos in placing Demetrios at the center of the controversy, but his account differs markedly from Kinnamos' in placing himself there, as well. According to Hugo, Demetrios returned from Germany eager to stir up anti-Latin hatred by publicizing their erroneous opinion about the Son of Man. The controversy spread beyond ecclesiastical circles, so that the Latins of the capital were subject to public ridicule. When Manuel learned of the controversy, he summoned Hugo to the palace and asked him to explain the Roman doctrine on the subject. When Hugo did so, Manuel declared that he agreed with him. Many of the important men went along with him, but some bitter old men and envious young ones were violently opposed. Three of his opponents, "who were considered philosophers," tried to refute Hugo in a debate that continued intermittently for several days. The emperor decided that the issue must be resolved by the standing Synod, which convened in March 1166. Hugo notes with regret that the solution of this Synod was not perfect because the emperor had to compromise. The other sources further complicate the picture. The synodal records mention neither the westerners nor Demetrios of Lampe. Eustathios, bishop of Thessalonike (c. 1178–c. 1196), reports that the Church was divided on the issue and praises Manuel for solving the controversy with his theological acumen. He also lauds the inscriptions erected in the Hagia Sophia with an allusion to Luke 19:40, "The very stones cry out . . ." But he mentions no external source of the conflict – no Latins, no Demetrios. So, too, with Niketas Choniates, a historian who, in contrast to Kinnamos, is usually critical of Manuel. He differs from Eustathios in reporting that the whole controversy was begun by Manuel, in stating that the imperial solution was an error, and in seeing the inscription in the Great Church as an act of hubris. He agrees, however, that the entire problem was an internal Byzantine one. Given Niketas' critical stance, it is doubly interesting that he does not blame Manuel's position on his Latin advisors.

The crucial sources discovered and published by Classen, along with Classen's account of Christological controversies in the west at the time, may provide the perspective necessary to understand these conflicting reports. From western sources, we know that Demetrios' visit to

Germany coincided with a Christological controversy which was occupying many of the best minds of the Latin Church, including the followers of Gilbert de la Porée and Gerhoch of Reichersberg.²⁰ Far from reporting *the* Latin opinion, then, Demetrios had taken sides in this controversy. As far as we can tell, he had adopted much of Gerhoch's position, which included not only criticism of the specific Christological teachings of other Latins, but also suspicion of some of the new theological trends of the twelfth century.

Hugo Eteriano, Manuel, and the Synod all disagreed with Demetrios' ideas. But they understood Demetrios' position differently and condemned it for different reasons. Hugo's reasons for disagreement stemmed from the Latin world of which he was a part. His Latin education, Latin loyalties, and Latin connections made his participation less a Greek story than a Latin one. He saw the problem as a twelfth-century Latin scholar, trained in the schools of France, would – as a philosophical and logical problem. In philosophical and logical matters, Hugo was often in agreement with the followers of Gilbert de la Porée, so his opposition to Demetrios was probably based less on patristic authorities than on the new theological learning of France and his alliance with the Gilbertines, who were opposed to Gerhoch of Reichersberg. Around 1160 in Constantinople, that also meant opposing Demetrios.

In contrast, the response of Manuel and the Synod showed no awareness of the Latin controversies – neither the specific issues of Christology nor the new theological methods which were at the center of all controversy in the twelfth century. So although Demetrios had imported the issue from the west, he imported it to a world that did not know of Abelard's *Sic et Non* and other clarion calls of western twelfth-century theology. While Abelard had shown that the Fathers often disagreed and had convinced many in the west that it was therefore necessary to apply logic and dialectic even to theology, the Byzantine Church had rejected and condemned those who tried to reassess philosophy's role in theology and had returned to the traditional opinion that answers were to be sought in the writings of the Fathers.²¹ In Byzantium, the reconciliation of patristic opinions was handled in an altogether more traditional manner. Acknowledgment that individual Fathers had sometimes erred in particular contexts was balanced by invoking a rough hierarchy of authority, by citing the majority of patristic witnesses against a minority opinion, by a tendency toward selective citation, and by a tendency to express contested points in general terms to which most people could subscribe. The Latin use of dialectic to

²⁰ Classen 1955: 346–351.

²¹ On intellectual developments in Byzantium in the twelfth century, see Magdalino 1991; 1993a: ch. 5.

resolve disagreements seemed to be an inappropriate use of reason to comprehend mysteries and even paradoxes. Thus, the Synod of 1166 resolved the dispute partly by citing the Fathers – probably from a collection Manuel had commissioned Hugo to compile – and partly by framing the canons from their deliberations in broad, even vague, terms. Hence our confusion about their relationship to Hugo. They may have started from a patristic collection drawn up by the Pisan, and they agreed with him in condemning Demetrios, but they did not accept or adopt the pre-scholastic reasoning by which Hugo had reached his conclusions. Ironically, they actually end up with a position a lot like Gerhoch's.²²

Where did this leave Hugo? Although he must have agreed with some of the emphases in the canons of the council and the imperial decree that followed, he cannot have been satisfied with the way the canons were formulated, for they were not up to his standards as a man deeply imbued with both ancient Greek and modern Latin logic.²³ A manuscript in Salzburg – discovered, analyzed, and published by Classen – contains a text in which Hugo complains about the Synod's decisions. Among other things, he must have known that the vagueness of the Synod's pronouncements left room for his opponents to claim that the eastern Synod supported their position, which is indeed what Gerhoch or one of his followers did. The same Salzburg manuscript, which includes some of the canons of the Synod of 1166, was probably sent to pope Alexander III to convince him that the eastern patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem had endorsed Gerhoch's position in the Christological controversy.

This exchange of Latin and Greek theology and the comparisons it makes possible is rife with possibilities for the history of Latin theology in the twelfth century, and especially with possibilities for a reassessment of the role of Hugo Eteriano. That, however, is a job for historians of Latin theology. I have retold the story and reassessed its meaning here for what it can reveal about the relationship between the radical alterations in western learning in the twelfth century, the Latins who ended up in Byzantium, and the Byzantine Church. Although the story of the controversy of 1160 to 1166 has been told as the story of an emperor trying to force Latin doctrine on the Synod because he wants to pursue Church union and an alliance with the pope against the Germans, it is not that simple.²⁴ As Classen points out, the pope had taken no clear position on the doctrine in question. Perhaps Manuel had hopes for union around 1160, perhaps he

²² Classen 1955: 355–364; cf. Gouillard 1967: 218. ²³ Classen 1955: 360.

²⁴ Dondaine 1958: 83: "The major goal of Manuel's reign is at play here: to remove the obstacles to the political and religious union of the empire. Manuel learns the Latin interpretation from Hugo Eteriano and holds to it despite opposition from his clergy; politics imposes the theological solution."

was worried that the attacks of Demetrios of Lampe on “Latin” doctrine would prove an obstacle to union, and perhaps he therefore consulted Hugo Eteriano for help justifying the “Latin” position. But it seems just as likely that the emperor’s interest resulted from purely internal pressures.²⁵ According to Kinnamos, Demetrios was spreading the controversy throughout the capital: “He elevated the developing controversy to great size, and there was nobody anywhere who did not then talk and inquire about it.”²⁶ According to Choniates, Manuel is the cause of the controversy, but it still becomes a source of much contention. Only the western sources give Hugo Eteriano a role of any importance.

This complicated narrative illustrates both of the major themes of this chapter. First, Latin theology is changing in both content and method, and the Byzantines cannot remain oblivious to these changes. Second, while there are explicit theological differences here, deemed important by both sides, there are also historical and contextual differences that are both fundamentally important and seldom, if ever, explicit. The failure to see these historical roots of some of the differences often means that neither side understands the precise issues at stake for the other. The two sides misunderstand one another on a level that is both fundamentally important and never explicit. On the one hand, both sides comprise Nicene Christians who have no doubts about the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father. On the other, they harbor profoundly different concerns, many of which are deeply rooted in their different histories. The western conflict about what Jesus meant when he said “The Father is greater than I” arose in regions that had fought various kinds of subordinationism (the belief that the Son is somehow less than / inferior to / posterior to the Father, aka “Arianism” or “Adoptionism”) for centuries longer than the Greek east had. On the other hand, the Greek east had seen several centuries more conflict about the distinct, unmixed, and yet hypostatically united two natures in Jesus Christ. The unfolding of Orthodox doctrine in relation to what came to be considered the heresies of monophysitism, monothelism, and monenergism had left the Greeks considerably more wary of human reasoning in theological matters. Although some in the west still opposed the theological methods of Abelard, Peter Lombard, and others, western culture had turned a corner in regard to reasoning and theology and was moving rapidly away from Greek Orthodox culture. In sum, the two sides do not merely misunderstand each other or even talk past one another; they bring different ideas, different histories, and different emotional responses to certain issues to the table. They have different ideas about what can or cannot be compromised – or for that matter even discussed.

²⁵ Classen 1955: 363. ²⁶ Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos* 6.2 (tr. Brand 190).

THE EUCHARISTIC BREAD IN THE AGE OF
TRANSUBSTANTIATION (1234)

Fundamental cultural differences could simultaneously determine the course of discussions between Latins and Greeks and be invisible to the participants themselves. A second example comes from the empire of Nicaea. After the Fourth Crusade's sack of Constantinople and the establishment of a Latin emperor in Constantinople (1204), Greek refugees from Constantinople established an empire-in-exile with its capital in Nicaea.²⁷ Given its origin, it is remarkable that this empire would have any friendly diplomatic contact with the papacy. Nor should the papacy have responded amicably, given that the popes supported both the Latin emperors in Constantinople and the Latinization of the Greek Church in Latin-controlled lands. Then again, politics makes strange bedfellows, and various factors in the 1220s and 1230s inclined both the pope and the Nicene emperor toward peace.²⁸

So, in 1232 Germanos II, patriarch in Nicaea (1223–1240), wrote to pope Gregory IX (1227–1241), using as messengers friars who were passing through Asia Minor on their way back from Jerusalem. Germanos' letter urged the pope to work with him to resolve the differences between the two Churches. Given that each side was adamant about being right, he said, they must agree to submit to the judgment of the Scriptures and the Fathers, each side correcting the other. As for claims that Rome was necessarily correct because of Peter, Germanos reminded the pope that Paul had challenged Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2:11–21) and that Peter had hardly been a pillar of strength during Christ's passion. The pope's response was predictable: he reasserted Peter's, and therefore the pope's, primacy; he repeated the by-now-traditional formula for reunion – namely, that the Greeks must return to obedience to Rome first, and only then could some of the issues be discussed. But he also agreed to send some envoys to Nicaea.

Accounts of the resulting discussions give us a mixed picture of intellectual exchange between Greeks and Latins – perhaps for that very reason we should give them credence.²⁹ There are moments of willingness to learn and a considerable effort to understand the other side – even if only to better refute their arguments – but the embassy ends in acrimony. Most intriguingly, at various points the two sides misunderstand one another in ways that are far more important and more profound than merely their inability to speak one another's languages. The western delegation, comprising two Franciscans and two Dominicans, arrived in Nicaea

²⁷ Angold 1975.

²⁸ For accounts of these negotiations and discussions, see Golubovich 1919; Gill 1979: 65–74.

²⁹ Avvakumov 2011.

in January 1234. The letter they carried emphasized that the pope possessed both temporal and spiritual authority; used Old Testament passages to urge unity among Christians; and raised the issue of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist, arguing that the type of bread did not matter because, whatever the bread was at the beginning, it was transubstantiated by the Mass into the body of Christ. Entering into discussion with the Greeks, they began by asking why the Greeks had withdrawn their obedience from the Roman See. The Greeks replied that it was because Rome was in error in its use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist and in its teaching about the procession of the Holy Spirit. The papal envoys then proposed that discussions begin with the bread of the Eucharist, but the Greeks wanted to start with the *filioque*.

The section of the papal letter about the bread of the Eucharist and this opening exchange have received relatively little attention, especially compared to the long discussion of procession of the Holy Spirit that follows it. This is unfortunate because these passages exemplify my second theme: the profound difficulty of talking across contested cultural lines. As we saw in the disputes of the 1160s, comparison of what seem to be apples with apples and oranges with oranges often turns out, on closer inspection, to be more complicated than that. In general, Latins up to this time have raised the issue of the Eucharistic bread only in response to Greek attacks. The Latin position has been that either type of bread is acceptable and that the only Greek error in this connection is Greek refusal to recognize the validity of the Latin practice.³⁰ In general, as well, Latins have been less interested in discussing the Eucharistic bread than Greeks have. Yet in this instance the pope's letter raises the issue of the Eucharistic bread and then his envoys profess a desire to discuss that issue before the theology of the Trinity. What is going on here?

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Latin world is in the midst of contested and fluctuating ideas about the Eucharist as the True Body of Christ. Miri Rubin and others have explained in considerable detail how, from the Eucharistic controversy about the Real Presence in the 1150s to the Fourth Lateran Council's declaration of the doctrine of transubstantiation to the introduction of the feast of Corpus Christi in the later thirteenth century, the Latin world continuously reasoned about and ruminated on the body of Christ. Theological treatises attempted to explain it rationally; preachers urged their congregations to accept that the Eucharistic bread really *was* Christ's body without question; pious believers saw an infant on the paten where the host should have been or tasted bleeding meat on their tongue instead of the wafer; and stories of Jews defiling the Eucharist inspired pogroms.³¹ In this context the papal letter's stress on the

³⁰ Schabel 2011: 92–97. ³¹ Rubin 1991.

Eucharist is illuminating: the pope is not worried about whether the bread is leavened or unleavened, but seeks rather to ensure that the doctrine of transubstantiation is accepted. The Greeks, however, completely miss this point. When they finally agree to talk about the Eucharistic bread at all – at first they refuse on the grounds that the procession of the Holy Spirit is much more important – they return to old arguments about what Christ used at the Last Supper, what Peter and Paul introduced as the custom in the churches they founded, and so on.

To understand this, we must return to the eleventh century. Greek concern about and arguments against the use of unleavened bread developed in the early eleventh century in the context of an influx of Armenian Christians, who used unleavened bread in the Eucharist, into the empire. These Armenians also rejected the Formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451) regarding the two natures of the Incarnate Christ, which made them, in Byzantine eyes, “Monophysites.”³² Byzantines therefore focused on what the lack of leaven in the bread might imply about a Church’s understanding of the hypostatic union. Thus they argued that the bread of the Eucharist must be leavened because only bread with air in it could reflect the two natures of Christ. They also turned to the Gospel of John, in which the Last Supper occurs before the days of unleavened bread, and rather awkwardly tried to harmonize the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels, wherein it is clear that the Last Supper was a Passover seder, with John’s account. In making these arguments about the Last Supper *not* being a seder, the Greeks also connected the use of unleavened Eucharistic bread to “Judaizing” – a label they had attached to the Armenians since the seventh century. All of these accusations were transferred to the Latins in the middle of the eleventh century. Before the thirteenth century, Latins tended to respond to Greek criticism of their unleavened wafers by maintaining that the type of bread in the Eucharist was a matter of indifference. They did not deny the validity of the Greek use of leavened bread but merely insisted that the Greeks accept their usage. But by the thirteenth century, as we have seen, Latins were deeply concerned with the Eucharistic bread for an entirely different set of reasons: they were in the middle of a few centuries of theological debates about the Real Presence that led to the condemnation of more than one theologian and in which the laity seem to have become ever more attached to the Body and Blood of Christ. This discussion in 1234 about the substance of the Eucharistic bread was, for the Greeks, a discussion about biblical exegesis, the two natures of Christ, and traditional usage. For the Latins, it was essential that the

³² “Monophysite” is a pejorative term used by “Dyophysites” to characterize their opponents; it is a label, rather than an identity.

Greeks accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. It is no wonder that nothing came of the resulting discussions.³³

CONCLUSIONS

In 1261 a Byzantine army from Nicaea recaptured Constantinople, removing the Latin emperor and patriarch and beginning the final period of the empire. This period, named Palaiologan after its ruling dynasty, is infamous for the military, political, and economic weakness of the empire, the civil wars, the way that crisis seems always to pile upon crisis, and the anti-Latin hatred that boiled over periodically. Ironically, it is also known for its intellectual developments, its artistic style, and its openness to the west. Everything depends upon whether one is discussing social, political, and economic history or intellectual and art history. Other chapters in this volume will cover Greek engagement with Latin theology and philosophy, as well as the crucial exchanges that took place at the Council of Florence. The late thirteenth century was less rich than the fourteenth and fifteenth in this sort of exchange and contact, however. When he recovered the capital of the empire of the Romans in 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos immediately faced the threat of a crusade to be launched against him and his “schismatic” Church in the name of the Latin emperor of Constantinople. To forestall this threat, he strove to convince the papacy that he sincerely wished to reunite the Churches and to persuade his own clergy that there was nothing damnable in such a reunion. When his efforts met resistance, he resorted to persecution of those who opposed the union. Those opponents were a majority among the clergy and probably the vast majority among the people, for the Fourth Crusade, the Latin domination, and the papal demands for Latinization of the Greek Church had immeasurably increased anti-Latin fervor. One can find little evidence in the period leading up to the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 of genuine intellectual exchange between Greeks and Latins. Even at the Council itself, which celebrated the reunion of the Churches, the Greeks had little to say; the job of the Greek delegation to Lyons was to do as the emperor wished and they had been carefully chosen for their loyalty to him. When the delegates returned to Constantinople, documents of union in hand – documents which demanded a Latinization of the Greek Church very similar to what the popes had demanded during the Latin occupation – the overwhelming reaction of their compatriots was horror and rejection. George Metochites, one of the delegates, famously reports that the people

³³ For an analogous case in which the theological discussions internal to each side hampered discussion of a difference between them, see Avvakumov 2011.

yelled, “You have become Franks!” at them; they had, in modern terms, sold out.

The surprising thing is that there were some interesting intellectual developments even in this polarized and polarizing context. John Bekkos, chartophylax of the Great Church, who had been jailed for his opposition to Church union, was persuaded by readings supplied to him in prison and converted to the union cause. Whereupon he became the patriarch of Constantinople after the anti-unionist patriarch resigned. Many have doubted the sincerity of Bekkos’ conversion or questioned the quality of his theological reasoning; regardless, his commitment to union was shared by only a few other men and could not conquer the kind of popular anti-Latin sentiment that, in the end, choked all of Michael VIII’s attempts to enforce the union. No amount of theological reasoning or intellectual engagement could erase the history of the Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire of Constantinople. By the fourteenth century, it is obvious that historical events had rendered theological agreement impossible.³⁴ I have argued here that it is equally important to recognize how different histories hampered earlier intellectual dialogue, too. The history in question is less obvious than the crusaders’ sack of Constantinople, of course. For example, the role of the Byzantine annexation of Armenia in the controversy between Greeks and Latins regarding the Eucharistic bread was unnoticed for centuries. Nevertheless, the different histories of east and west included intellectual histories. Only by understanding these differences can we begin to understand not only *that* the two sides talked past one another, but also *why* they did so.

³⁴ Kolbaba 2011.

CHAPTER 29
THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY

NORMAN RUSSELL

The Hesychast controversy dominated intellectual life in fourteenth-century Byzantium for over three decades. It began with an exchange of letters between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria in 1336 and, despite successive Constantinopolitan synods to resolve the matter, was only brought to a conclusion with the official proclamation of Palamas as a saint in 1368. The fundamental issue was the nature of divine–human communion. Palamas defended the reality of such communion by positing a distinction between God’s essence (οὐσία / *ousia*), which is imparticipable (incapable of being shared by created beings), and his energies (ἐνέργεια / *energeia*), which are participable. His opponents regarded this as compromising the divine unity, accusing Palamas of ditheism. Although the initial correspondence between Palamas and Barlaam concerned the epistemological value of apodictic syllogisms in theology, the controversy soon moved on to the character of the divine unity, and in its final stages came to focus on the nature of the divine light seen by the apostles at the Transfiguration. In this chapter we shall examine how the idea of divine–human communion – referred to in the Greek tradition as *theosis*, or deification – came to generate such passionate debate when previously it had not been a matter of contention.

THE FIRST PHASE: BARLAAM’S ARISTOTELIAN CHALLENGE

Barlaam the Calabrian came to Constantinople around 1330.¹ He rapidly established a reputation as an expert in Aristotelian logic and in early 1335 was invited to address the imperial court and patriarchal synod on the subject of the errors of the Latins.² The discourses he delivered, published as *Against the Latins*, were well received by the Greeks and continued to be appreciated even after his ignominious departure from Constantinople in 1341. In these discourses Barlaam sought to show that western arguments in

¹ For the chronology of Barlaam’s activities in Byzantium, see Sinkewicz 1982: 183–187; for the beginning of his engagement with Palamas, see also Sinkewicz 1980.

² On Barlaam’s character as a philosopher, see Sinkewicz 1981.

favor of the *filioque* were invalid because neither apodictic nor dialectical syllogisms could attain to certain knowledge of God. God, as beyond being, was not susceptible of apodictic proof, nor could the mind ascend to him by dialectical reasoning on the basis of commonly accepted premises.³ The context of these assertions was quite specific, but when Palamas came to study Barlaam's arguments he interpreted them much more broadly. For Palamas, the denial that the procession of the Holy Spirit could be demonstrated implied that in no circumstances could God be the subject of certain knowledge. As the author of two apodictic treatises himself on the procession of the Holy Spirit (published in the latter part of 1335, more or less simultaneously with Barlaam's treatises), Palamas felt obliged to respond. Not knowing Barlaam personally at the time, he wrote to a common friend, Gregory Akindynos, in the knowledge that his letter would be passed on. This letter marks the beginning of the Hesychast controversy.⁴

In his letter Palamas agrees with Barlaam that the Latins argue neither apodictically, because their basic axioms are not self-evident, nor dialectically, because their premises are not accepted by their Greek opponents. But apodictic proof of God must be possible, "otherwise there is no knowledge at all about God."⁵ Palamas then makes an important distinction, one that was to underlie the whole controversy: some things are entirely unknowable – the modes of generation and procession within the Godhead, for example – "but of the other things we have knowledge by faith."⁶ Dialectics lead only to probabilities; apodictics give us certainty when they are based on the revealed truths of Scripture – and Palamas offers in his letter what he regards as a model apodictic syllogism; nevertheless, the highest knowledge comes through faith.

In his reply Barlaam examines Palamas' statements in great detail.⁷ He carefully explains why God cannot be known by apodictic reasoning, showing in the course of his discussion how Palamas' example fails to meet the criteria required by apodictic proof.⁸ The Latins, too, are overconfident about the powers of the human mind. But even if the limits of human reasoning are transcended, God can still not be known as he is in himself. The rules of correct reasoning, as laid down by Aristotle, do not permit it because the direct perception of the supraessentiality of God is

³ Sinkewicz 1982: 189–196.

⁴ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Akindynos* (pp. 203–219). For an analysis, see Sinkewicz 1982: 196–202; cf. Ierodiakonou 2002b: 225–235.

⁵ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Akindynos* 8 (p. 212.6–5). Palamas, according to the *Life* by Philotheos Kokkinos (*Encomium on Gregory Palamas* II), was trained in Aristotelian logic.

⁶ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Akindynos* 8 (p. 212.11).

⁷ Barlaam, *Letter 1* (pp. 229–266). For an analysis, see Sinkewicz 1982: 202–215.

⁸ Barlaam, *Letter 1*.333–85 (pp. 242–244).

impossible, and without direct perception “such premisses [concerning the supraessentiality of God] do not represent knowledge for us, but only opinions.”⁹ Not even the inspired utterances of Scripture and the Fathers, Barlaam believes, “can be assimilated to apodictic discourse with regard to God, principally because we need much vigilance and watchfulness and almost divine illumination before we can understand each statement about God in these utterances correctly and comprehend what follows from them without stumbling.”¹⁰ Barlaam is not professing agnosticism; he simply argues that the limitations of human reason preclude, in formal logical terms, certain knowledge of God.

In his reply to Barlaam, Palamas adopts a new tack based on the Byzantine distinction between “outer” (i.e. pagan) and “inner” (i.e. Christian) wisdom. In relying on Aristotle, Barlaam is approaching Christian truth from the perspective of outer wisdom. This does not get the inquirer very far, in Palamas’ view, which is why, toward the end of his *First Letter*, he says to Barlaam: “I have decided to take you back to the school of the Fathers.”¹¹ This is precisely what he does in his *Second Letter*. The Fathers talk about “the realities around God.” Barlaam had challenged Palamas to explain how, if these realities participated in existence and were therefore either substances or accidents, he could avoid saying that they were the same as the divine substance.¹² Palamas replies by appealing to St. Basil of Caesarea. God in himself, as substance or essence, is ineffable and beyond human conception. But as the being of things that exist, the life of things that are living, and the wisdom of those who have become wise, he may, to some extent, be demonstrated apodictically. The realities in which creation participates are not the substance of God but his energies, otherwise the substance of God would be regarded as created.¹³ As Sinkewicz observes, “this is the nucleus of what would become Palamas’ doctrine of the essence and energies of God.”¹⁴

By moving the debate to “the school of the Fathers” Palamas placed himself in a much stronger position than that he had occupied hitherto. In his initial letter he had claimed that besides the ordinary Christian’s ability to ascend by an intellectual process from participation in goodness to Goodness itself, from participation in life to Life itself, and from participation in wisdom to Wisdom itself, the God-bearing Fathers, through the purity of heart attained by them, had been granted by grace “an intellectual illumination that is God and resembles light, or rather that is a source of intellectual and immaterial light.”¹⁵ Barlaam was prepared to

⁹ Barlaam, *Letter 1*.446–7 (p. 247). ¹⁰ *Ibid.* 620–4 (p. 254).

¹¹ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Barlaam* 32 (pp. 243, 28–244, 1); cited and tr. Sinkewicz 1982: 218.

¹² Barlaam, *Letter 1*.671–4 (p. 256). ¹³ Palamas, *Letter 2 to Barlaam* 32 (pp. 278–279).

¹⁴ Sinkewicz 1982: 221. ¹⁵ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Akindynos* 12 (p. 216.8–9).

concede that divine illumination could be a source of knowledge about God, for when he sees how the ancient philosophers construct their arguments – we should note, as Palamas did, that for him they are “ancient” rather than “outer” thinkers – he is “unable to accept that these too have not been illuminated by God and so risen above the multitude.”¹⁶ In his response to this passage, Palamas asks incredulously whether Barlaam is claiming that the pagan philosophers had come to participate in the divine light.¹⁷ Taking his cue from St. Gregory of Nazianzos, he quotes Plato back at him: “To know God is difficult, but to speak of him is impossible.”¹⁸ The Church Fathers reveal an incomparably richer experience of God. Through love, the Christian cleaves to God with an erotic intensity, the union of God with the worthy transcending all other kinds of union. The illumination attained by the pagan philosophers, even by Plotinos, was merely demonic.¹⁹ In the Christian version, the light granted to a purified soul is divine and permeates it fully, even irradiating the body.

The debate between Palamas and Barlaam in its final stages thus comes to focus on the nature of participation in the divine. In his third letter to Palamas, Barlaam makes it clear that he regards Palamas’ conception of participation in the divine light as far too physical. Palamas seems to him to be making the light a hypostatic reality, whereas he himself understands it metaphorically as the receiving of knowledge from God.²⁰ He obviously decided afterwards to make his own inquiries. For in a letter addressed to a monk called Ignatios he mentions meeting some of Ignatios’ fellow-Hesychasts in Thessalonike who initiated him into their teachings about seeing various lights, controlling their breathing, and other things which he thought were bound to lead to sheer insanity.²¹ This account of Hesychast practices was to be developed polemically in Barlaam’s treatise of 1340, *Against the Messalians*. The treatise, however, backfired. Palamas was able to marshal support from Mount Athos and at a Synod held in June 1341 to resolve the matter, Barlaam was condemned.

THE SECOND PHASE: AKINDYNOS’ CONSERVATIVE REACTION

Gregory Akindynos had been following the debate closely from the beginning. Unlike Palamas and Barlaam, he had no particular expertise in Aristotelian logic, but he had received an excellent education in Thessalonike from Thomas Magistros, one of the best teachers of the

¹⁶ Barlaam, *Letter* 1.843–5 (p. 262). ¹⁷ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Barlaam* 35 (p. 245.26–27).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (p. 246.6), quoting *Timaeus* 28c; cf. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 28.4.

¹⁹ Palamas, *Letter 1 to Barlaam* 46 (p. 252.9–22), quoting Porphyry, *Life of Plotinos* 2.

²⁰ Barlaam, *Letter* 3.321–8 (p. 292).

²¹ Barlaam, *Letter* 5.114–27 (pp. 323–324). On this episode, see Rigo 1989: 44–58, 273–274.

age, and after embracing the monastic life had manifestly steeped himself in the writings of the Fathers.²² He accepts what Barlaam has to say about dialectical syllogisms and the incontestability of correct inferences when both parties in a debate agree on the premises. But he refuses to accept that this is the only way of establishing what is true. There is also the banishing of erroneous opinion by the imparting of knowledge from one who knows to one who is ignorant.²³ What he means by this is that disputed matters can be settled by an appeal to authority, and the authority he has in mind, as is evident from his writings, is the testimony of the Fathers.

In according priority to patristic witness, Akindynos is in agreement with Palamas. But as the latter's dispute with Barlaam escalated, he became increasingly uneasy about the way Palamas was using his authorities. In the course of his seven antirrhetic treatises against Palamas' "innovative doctrines," composed in 1343–1344, when he was in the ascendancy as the patriarch John Kalekas' theological advisor, Akindynos sets out the hermeneutic principles which he believes must govern any appeal to the Fathers.²⁴ Central to them is the conviction that because all the Fathers are inspired by the same Holy Spirit, one text can be used to explain another. But in order to avoid arbitrary interpretations, the context of each patristic citation must be carefully studied. Furthermore, it is axiomatic that each author is consistent with himself. Finally, any given interpretation must be in accordance with ecclesiastical tradition. Akindynos is fully aware of the different approaches to be found in the Fathers. So how are apparent contradictions to be resolved? A careful study must be undertaken of the context, both the immediate setting of any citation and the broader framework, to establish what the author actually means. In the last resort there is an order of priority among the Fathers, with St. Gregory the Theologian (i.e. of Nazianzos) occupying the first place.

When Akindynos applies these principles to the arguments Palamas has based on the Fathers, he concludes that Palamas has manipulated his sources and arrived at false conclusions. To take a specific example, in his *Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite* Palamas cites a text from Basil of Caesarea on the divine *energeiai* in response to the Barlaamite's challenging him to specify which of the Fathers speaks about the uncreated essence as being superior to uncreated grace.²⁵ St. Basil asks what the operations (*energeiai*) of the Spirit are and concludes from his review of them that the Spirit is superior to all things and coexists with the Father and the Son. Akindynos looks up the passage in its original setting and protests that

²² For a biography of Akindynos, see Nadal 2002: 189–223.

²³ Akindynos, *Letter 9.1–11* (*Letters*, p. 28). ²⁴ For a detailed analysis, see Nadal 1974.

²⁵ Palamas, *Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite* 20 (pp. 182–183). Cf. Nadal 1974: 319–320. The text from St. Basil the Great is *On the Holy Spirit* 19.49 (PG 32:156D–157A).

Basil says nothing here about uncreated energies. He is speaking of the eternity of the Spirit. The text, Akindynos insists, cannot be made to support the idea of a multitude of uncreated things inferior to the Spirit. The term “inferior” in Basil refers to anything we can conceive of, “even thousands of possible worlds anterior to the creation of intellectual beings,” which “would still be subsequent to the Spirit and therefore inferior.”²⁶ “Inferior” refers to mental fictions, not to uncreated realities. And to support his argument, Akindynos adduces another passage from Basil’s treatises which makes a similar point with regard to God’s Word.

For Akindynos, God is one nature in three hypostases. There are no other distinctions to be made within the Godhead. The question then arises: if God is conceived of simply as transcendent essence, even if subsisting in three hypostases, how do human beings commune with him in such a way as to attain *theosis*, or participation in the divine life? This was identified by Palamas in his *Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite* as the fundamental issue. Akindynos responds with an exposition of *theosis* on the basis of key passages from Dionysios the Areopagite and Maximos the Confessor. The Areopagite defines *theosis* as “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as possible.”²⁷ Akindynos argues that if *theosis* is a relation of likeness to God by those who imitate him, it is something created, not co-eternal with God. The union of human beings with God entails the maintenance of a difference between the uncreated and the created. Palamas’ talk of human beings becoming co-eternal with God is, in Akindynos’ view, “the height of impiety.”²⁸ It confuses the believer with Christ himself. For, like iron made red by fire, Christ’s human nature was totally divinized by the divinity of the Word. How can Palamas dare, Akindynos asks, “to call uncreated and non-finite those who have not even ‘become participants in the divine nature’ but have only shared in the energy and, as you put it, a second and inferior divinity?”²⁹

Shortly afterwards Akindynos embarks on an exegesis of the phrase he has just quoted from Peter’s Second Letter.³⁰ Maximos, quoting 2 Peter 1:4, declares that the reason why we were created was so as to become participants in the divine nature.³¹ “How sublime!” says Akindynos. The other Fathers, beginning with the apostle Peter, were content simply to say that we become participants in the divine nature and that by it we are

²⁶ From Akindynos’ *Fifth Treatise*, cited by Nadal 1974: 320.

²⁷ Akindynos, *Refutations* II.34.3–4, citing pseudo-Dionysios, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.3.

²⁸ Akindynos, *Refutations* II.34.26–9; the whole discussion of *theosis* in *Refutations* II.34–8 is important.

²⁹ Akindynos, *Refutations* III.76.72–5 (quoting 2 Peter 1:4).

³⁰ *Ibid.* 90. On the background to this exegesis, see Russell 1988.

³¹ Maximos, *Letter* 24 (*PG* 91:609c), reproduced in *Letter* 43 (*PG* 91:640b).

cleansed and deified. Maximos adds that this was the divine plan from the beginning. But Palamas is not content with this. He makes us participants in a host of other gods and divinities, thus compromising the divine unity. In the face of the clear statements of the Fathers, how can Palamas maintain that the divine nature is imparticipable, and then create lesser divinities that are participable? The one, simple, and indivisible trihypostatic God is present everywhere and fills all things in a manner that surpasses our understanding.

The dialogue *Theophanes* (early autumn 1342) is Palamas' response to Akindynos. His own hermeneutic principles are not different from those of his opponent. The golden rule is that any interpretation must be in harmony with orthodox doctrines of the past. Indeed, such harmony is "the rule of orthodox belief" and its demonstration counts as apodictic proof.³² Palamas argues that the divine nature is both participable and imparticipable. He agrees that the apparent contradiction in 2 Peter 1:4 calls for examination, especially as it seems to be supported by Maximos the Confessor (Palamas quotes the same text as Akindynos) and Gregory of Nyssa, who speaks of Paul as a vessel "capable of containing the nature that is uncontainable."³³ With regard to 2 Peter 1:4, Palamas looks at the context of the verse in Peter's letter and shows that participation is a divine gift, one that is promised to those who live according to Christ. With regard to Maximos, he cites other texts from the same Father as the correct way to interpret his reference to "participants in the divine nature," notably a passage from one of the *Centuries* where Maximos says that created beings do not participate in the divine essence as such but that God finds some other mode by which those who are capable can participate in him, even though he himself does not emerge from the hiddenness of his essence.³⁴ God *is* everywhere and in everything (as Akindynos has underlined) but nothing is capable of containing him. It is the divine power and energy common to the persons of the trihypostatic God that operates *ad extra* and is divided into countless parts, not his essential nature. Palamas' strategy is two-pronged, first to demonstrate that the Fathers support the distinction which he makes between the essence of God and his energies, and secondly to argue that the denial of this distinction entails the adherence of his opponent to one of the classic heresies – flinging back to Akindynos the charge of Messalianism. In other words, it is Akindynos who is the innovator, not Palamas himself.

³² Palamas, *Theophanes* 3 (p. 1240). The phrase "rule (or norm) of orthodox belief" (γνώμων τῆς εὐσεβείας) occurs in *Theophanes* 10 (p. 1262).

³³ *Ibid.* 13–15 (pp. 1266–1272). Cf. Maximos, *Letter* 24 (PG 91:609c) and Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* 3 (PG 44:821B–C).

³⁴ Palamas, *Theophanes* 13 (p. 1266). Cf. Maximos, *Various Texts* 1.7 (PG 90:1180).

Akindynos was not convinced, nor was the patriarch John Kalekas. Both sides in the dispute applied the same hermeneutic principles to biblical and patristic texts but with different results. Akindynos was not persuaded that the Fathers supported any notion of God that went beyond one nature in three hypostases. Palamas' position on essence and energies seemed to him to make God composite. Palamas for his part was convinced that without the energies created beings could not become participants in the divine nature. No arguments, whether conducted according to the rules of Aristotelian logic, or based on the application of commonly accepted principles governing the exegesis of authoritative texts, proved irrefutable. In 1343, as the civil war between John Kantakouzenos and the regency entered a critical phase (the empress, desperate for funds, pawned the crown jewels to Venice), Palamas was imprisoned. Even though he continued to write, his confinement brought a pause in the Hesychast controversy which lasted until Kantakouzenos' victory in 1347.

THE THIRD PHASE: GREGORAS' NEOPLATONIST CRITIQUE

One of Kantakouzenos' first actions after his triumphant entry into Constantinople was to preside over a series of synods which in February 1347 issued a *Tomos* reversing the position of the patriarch John Kalekas. Kalekas was deposed and Akindynos excommunicated. Isidore Boucheiras, a Palamite from Thessalonike who had been tonsured by Palamas, was elected patriarch in Kalekas' place, and thirty-two new bishops were appointed, all Hesychasts. These included Palamas himself, who was consecrated archbishop of Thessalonike, although he was unable to take up residence because his see was under Zealot control at the time.

Not all the bishops were happy with the election of Isidore as ecumenical patriarch and the elevation of Palamas to the episcopate. A dissident minority produced their own rival *Tomos* in July of the same year.³⁵ They objected to Isidore's seizure of office backed by secular power and to the consecration as bishop of a man who until then had been under official censure. They dissociated themselves from the Barlaamites, but Palamas' essence-energies distinction was nevertheless offensive to them. Among other things, it made the Taboric light a created entity. With his many "divinities" and "gods" Palamas had introduced a novel division into the one trihypostatic God. Such superior and inferior divinities, representing visible and invisible parts of God, were sheer inventions. In their *Tomos*, however, the dissident bishops simply state their objections without offering philosophical or theological arguments. The latter were to be

³⁵ Text in *PG* 150:877D-885A.

supplied by a newly tonsured monk who now came forward as the leader of the anti-Palamite camp, the philosopher Nikephoros Gregoras.

Gregoras had already been invited by the empress Anna in the last months of the regency to refute Palamas. His *Antirrhetics*, which now appeared, combine logical arguments of the kind Barlaam had used with appeals to the authority of the Fathers. Gregoras' philosophical approach, however, is very different from that of Barlaam.³⁶ Drawn more to Plotinos than to Aristotle, he regards syllogisms as a tool for mediocre minds, although he is prepared to use them. The way to wisdom lies in the mind's knowledge of itself. What he calls the "stationary movement" (ἀμετάβατος κίνησις / *ametabatos kinesis*) of the mind leads to an intellectual apprehension of the symbols that raise the mind to truth. Yet this truth is ultimately non-knowledge, ἀγνώσις (*agnosia*), because the mind is incapable of grasping the essences of what exists in the world of the senses, let alone rising to the knowledge of the supraessential essence that is God. The deity is only apprehensible through symbols in virtue of an image's participation in its prototype. "Seeing" God, in the way Palamas would have it, is an impossibility.

This is the approach that lies behind Gregoras' *Antirrhetics*. He begins by reviewing the history of the controversy so far, taking as his starting point a scandal involving the unmasking and expulsion from Mount Athos in 1344 of monks tainted with Bogomil beliefs.³⁷ His purpose is the rhetorical construction of Palamas as a heretic. He then embarks on an exposition of Palamas' doctrines. The main thrust of his argument is that with his essence–energies distinction Palamas posits "another uncreated divinity, a divinity that is infinitely inferior to the divine nature, is without essence, is visible in itself to the bodily eyes of men who are spiritual and pure in heart . . . [and] deifies the recipients of deification."³⁸ Palamas, in Gregoras' view, shatters the unity of God into a myriad fragments, whereas he himself says that the essence is uncreated and that there is nothing alongside this.

The rest of the first treatise is devoted to pressing home this accusation by the twofold strategy of deploying rational arguments and citing patristic authorities. As a result Gregoras sounds deceptively conservative. The rational arguments usually take the form of showing, by *reductio ad absurdum*, how Palamas' propositions lead to blatantly heretical conclusions. For example, speaking of God in terms of a higher and a lower divinity makes the first principle a duality, but the one nature of God

³⁶ For a detailed investigation of the philosophical basis of Gregoras' opposition to Palamism, see Moschos 1998.

³⁷ On Bogomilism and the scandal of 1344, see Rigo 1989. Palamas himself never refers to this affair.

³⁸ *Antirrhethika* I, 1.8.2 (pp. 179–183).

cannot be divided into two – that would make us like drunks seeing double.³⁹ Or if *energeia* is infinite divinity, it lacks mind, for no true knowledge is infinite, and so God is rendered irrational.⁴⁰ The patristic quotations are piled up in the conventional manner, but also inserted without attribution is the occasional text from a Neoplatonist. Gregoras accuses Palamas of following Plato in putting forward a lower divinity like the demiurge in the *Timaeus*.⁴¹ Yet he himself quotes or alludes to Plotinos when it suits him, as when he states that being entirely eludes definition,⁴² or asks how, when even essences in this world are inaccessible to the senses, we can have any knowledge of the supraessential essence.⁴³

In the second treatise, Gregoras develops questions he has raised earlier on participation in the divine.⁴⁴ He correctly understands Palamas to hold that the divine nature is in itself imparticipable but that God is participable through his uncreated energies. This, in his view, ignores biblical statements about God filling all things and the many patristic testimonies to the indivisibility of God. It makes Palamas not only a follower of the fourth-century heretic Eunomios, who likewise posited a hierarchy in the divine being, but also a Bogomil claiming to see God. In the course of his invective, Gregoras touches on *theosis*, or the divinization of the Christian, but only to attribute it to Palamas' teaching. It is not a concept that can be accommodated within his own perspective. Just as the soul transcends the body without being "contaminated" by it, so God in his view transcends the phenomenal world.⁴⁵ Transient objects of sense relate to the eternal as images (*eidola*) to their archetypes. God is approached through his emanations; we participate in him as we do in the sun through being bathed in the rays that emanate from it. This is a Neoplatonist approach focused on intellectual ascent, but an ascent only to a limited degree, for the One always eludes the human mind.⁴⁶ It is an approach far removed from the tradition that Palamas draws on, which teaches a dynamic incorporation of the Christian into the divine life, a transformation of our humanity made possible by the Incarnation of the Word.

The continued opposition to Palamism prompted John VI Kantakouzenos to convoke a new council in 1351. This council, which met in the Triclinium of the Palace of Blachernai, upheld Palamas and condemned Gregoras and his associates.⁴⁷ The situation, however, was not

³⁹ *Ibid.* 1.8.17 (p. 193.15–21). ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1.8.21 (p. 199.14–16). ⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1.10.6 (p. 213.13–17).

⁴² *Ibid.* 1.8.19 (p. 195.1–2); cf. Plotinos, *Enneads* 3.6.7.10–12.

⁴³ *Antirrhethika* I, 1.8.21 (p. 199.19); cf. Plotinos, *Enneads* 5.5.1.12–19.

⁴⁴ On Gregoras' notion of participation, see Moschos 1998: 227–234.

⁴⁵ *Antirrhethika* I, 2.5.10 (p. 307.5–12).

⁴⁶ Gregoras is discreet about the contribution of Plotinos and Proklos in his *Antirrhethics*, but much more explicit in some of his other works. For details, see Moschos 1998: 230–233.

⁴⁷ The text of the *Tomos* of 1351 is in *PG* 151:717–774. Gregoras, however, was not silenced. On his debate with Palamas held in 1355 in the presence of John V Palaiologos, see Balfour 1982.

thereby radically altered. Gregoras, although placed under house arrest, continued to write, incorporating a denunciation of Palamism into his *Roman History*. A former pupil of his, Theodore Dexios, addressed an appeal to the emperor, calling on him to set aside the findings of the council on procedural grounds because the accusers of the anti-Palamites were also their judges. He followed this up with two letters addressed to friends which are important for the new issues they raise.⁴⁸

One of the new issues that comes to the fore in Dexios' writings is that of the nature of the light of Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor. This issue had been raised before by both Barlaam and Akindynos, but around the time of the Synod of 1351 it became a major topic of debate. At the Synod Kantakouzenos asked Palamas' opponents to explain how they understood the Taboric light. As they struggled to answer, hampered by the conservative principle that nothing could be added to the language of the Gospels and the Fathers, it became clear that they could not agree among themselves on its character. For the Palamites, the light was manifestly uncreated. Most of the anti-Palamites, including Gregoras, regarded it as a symbol of divinity comprehensible by the human mind and therefore created. But for Dexios, the Taboric light was the same as the body of Christ itself and therefore could not merely be symbolic of divinity. It was created and yet transformed by the divine nature, a divinized light like the body assumed by the Word at the Incarnation. After the Synod this issue continued to be debated among the anti-Palamites.⁴⁹ It was to prove a fatal weakness to them in the final phase of the Hesychast controversy.

THE FOURTH PHASE: THE INFLUENCE OF AQUINAS

This final phase centers on the activities of the Kydones brothers.⁵⁰ The elder brother, Demetrios, was for most of the second half of the fourteenth century at the heart of imperial affairs as chief minister, first to Kantakouzenos and then to John V Palaiologos. His duties at the palace required him to receive numerous petitions from Latins with business in Constantinople, so he decided, rather than rely on translators, to learn Latin himself. His tutor was a Dominican who set him passages of Thomas Aquinas to translate as exercises. As a result he became interested in Aquinas' thinking.⁵¹ What impressed him initially was Aquinas' mastery of Plato and Aristotle. With Kantakouzenos' encouragement he began

⁴⁸ The texts have been edited by I.D. Polemis, with an important introduction.

⁴⁹ For a detailed exposition, see Polemis' introduction to his edition of Dexios, esp. xli–lvi, on which the above summary depends.

⁵⁰ I have given a fuller account of this phase in Russell 2003.

⁵¹ Demetrios Kydones, *First Apology* 360–361.

a translation of Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*, which he completed in December 1354. According to his own testimony, his translation stimulated an intense interest among the Greeks in Latin thought. By 1363, with his brother's help, he had also completed a translation of the *Summa theologiae*. These works were to prove useful to both sides of the Hesychast controversy.

Until the heresy trial of his brother Prochoros in 1368, Demetrios was discreet about his contempt for the Palamites. His only anti-Palamite treatise to that date was not meant for public circulation. Addressed to Constantine Asen, a nobleman related to the Bulgarian royal family, it accuses the Palamites of compromising the unity and simplicity of God by attributing a hypostatic existence to the divine attributes. The essence–energies distinction introduces confusion into the Trinity. Deeply influenced by his study of Aquinas, Demetrios insists that it is the relations within the Trinity that constitute the divine persons, not the attributes assigned to them.⁵² In private, however, he did engage in debate on these topics. In one of his letters he says that when he meets Palamites open to reason he attempts to bring them round to his own point of view, often with success.⁵³

His brother Prochoros was a more combative personality.⁵⁴ He became a monk at the Great Lavra on Mount Athos around 1350 but this did not prevent him from acquiring an excellent knowledge of Latin and helping Demetrios with his translation projects, including a Greek version of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. His militant anti-Palamism aroused the hostility of the other monks, who complained to the patriarch, Philotheos Kokkinos. In early 1367, Prochoros lodged a counter-complaint with the patriarch, sending with his letter two treatises written by him, one a refutation of the *Tomos* of 1351,⁵⁵ the other a work in six books entitled *On Essence and Energy*.⁵⁶ When Philotheos perused these works, he found them disturbing in both style and content. Stylistically, Prochoros presents his arguments along western scholastic lines as a series of articles with authorities ranged for and against and a solution offered in the form of a *responsio*. Doctrinally, his contention that the light which the Apostles saw coming from Christ at the Transfiguration was divine only in a manner of speaking put his orthodoxy in question. The patriarch appointed a theological commission to examine his writings, and advised Prochoros

⁵² Demetrios Kydones, *On the Properties of the Persons* 8 (p. 90.1–3); cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.28.1.

⁵³ Demetrios Kydones, *Letter* 226.24–31.

⁵⁴ On Prochoros Kydones, see Russell 2006, and for the historical context of his dispute, Rigo 2004.

⁵⁵ Only fragments survive in the Synodal *Tomos* of 1368 and the refutation by John Kantakouzenos.

⁵⁶ Books I and II are printed in *PG* 151:1191–1242 under the name of Akindynos. Book VI is edited by Candal (1954).

himself to study the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–681), which had decreed that Christ has two wills and two energies.

Prochoros was summoned to defend his views before the home synod in the spring of 1368. The patriarch's interrogation focused on the nature of Christ's glory. On being pressed to say whether it was created or uncreated, Prochoros insists that it was both, because Christ himself consists of both created and uncreated components. On this point Prochoros clearly follows what even in the anti-Palamite camp is the minority view of Theodore Dexios. The patriarch immediately puts his finger on the problem: Prochoros has a defective understanding of the "communication of idioms." Christ's radiance is the radiance of his divinity, which is communicated to his flesh. Prochoros is unable to accept that it is fully divine. Another question he raises concerns the vision of Christ's glory at the Last Judgment. Vision entails participation. How can the wicked, who will see this glory along with the righteous, participate in divinity? He supports his point with a quotation from Augustine's *On the Trinity*, which had been translated into Greek by Maximos Planoudes at the end of the previous century. The patriarch counters with a different interpretation of the text that reveals an accurate knowledge of its context. The result of the trial was predictable. Prochoros was excommunicated, and to emphasize the fact that Palamism was no longer open to challenge, Gregory Palamas was officially proclaimed a saint.

Prochoros' writings nevertheless required a detailed response. Two refutations were written, one by Kantakouzenos, a monk since his abdication in 1354, and the other by the Palamite bishop who had chaired the commission on Prochoros, Theophanes of Nicaea. Prochoros had raised new questions concerning the problem of human participation in the divine. How will God be seen, in reality or in the imagination? Does the eschatological deification of the righteous imply a qualitative change in them? If only those who have been spiritually transformed can see (and therefore participate in) the divine glory, how did Nebuchadnezzar, for example, see the glory of God as a fourth person with the three young men in the furnace (cf. Daniel 3:25)? Kantakouzenos responds to these questions in the traditional way with a series of patristic testimonies to prove that we do participate in God in reality, that this does entail a quantitative change, and that therefore a distinction must be made in God between his essence and his energies if we are to be deified in more than a metaphorical sense without becoming the same as God.

The second response is significant for the way it does not simply reiterate familiar Palamite arguments. Theophanes treats Prochoros' *aporiae* as real problems that require a solution.⁵⁷ Why, for example, was Judas excluded

⁵⁷ On Theophanes, see Polemis 1996.

from the vision of Christ's glory at the Transfiguration, yet included in the presumably more important event of the Last Supper? In offering an explanation, Theophanes makes a distinction between participation (μετουσία / *metousia*) and communion (κοινωνία / *koinonia*). Participation is the union and conjunction of two distinct things, of which one is the subject and the other is "in the subject." Fire, for example, participates in an *energeia* capable of burning and illuminating, which is how we know it is fire.⁵⁸ Communion, on the other hand, occurs when two or more things participate together in something else. For example, Peter and Paul participate in rationality and therefore have communion with each other.⁵⁹ Applied to the question under consideration, this distinction enables Theophanes to distinguish participation in Christ as God – not in the divine essence, because that would make us consubstantial with God, but in the divine energy or glory – from communion with him through the symbols of bread and wine in which both we and Christ participate. Participation in God, from which Judas was excluded, is thus superior to communion with him through a third term. Interestingly, on the problem of Nebuchadnezzar, Theophanes makes use of Aquinas' tripartite division of knowledge on levels of the intellect, the senses, and the imagination. Nebuchadnezzar apprehended the light only on the lower levels of the senses and the imagination and therefore did not attain participation in it.

THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE CONTROVERSY

Byzantinists tend to see the triumph of Palamism as "an extreme exaltation of the monks of Mt Athos defined as the spokesmen for Orthodoxy,"⁶⁰ following the victory of John Kantakouzenos in the civil war of 1341–1347, or even as a lurch toward fundamentalism through "the disparagement of reason and its exclusion from Christian life."⁶¹ From the point of view of intellectual history, however, the Hesychast controversy is essentially a conflict between two philosophical and theological traditions within Orthodoxy which had hitherto coexisted peacefully. One tradition conceived of divine–human communion in ontological terms. For the Palamites participation in God implied a real transformation, a change in human nature that could begin even in this life through contemplation, prayer, and sharing in the Eucharist. The other tradition understood divine–human communion mainly in analogical terms. For the anti-Palamites it was only in a manner of speaking that a human being could become divine. For them deification was the eschatological goal of the Christian life, not a reality attainable in this world. Both traditions had

⁵⁸ Theophanes, *Treatise* 1.262–275 (p. 182). ⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1.276–90 (pp. 182–183). ⁶⁰ Rigo 2004: 50.

⁶¹ Krausmüller 2006: 126.

ample patristic support, which is why it was so difficult to resolve the conflict. The authority of the emperor, which might have imposed a solution, was weak in the dying years of the empire. The method of Aristotelian logic, which Palamas himself had valued until he was shown its limitations by Barlaam, was opposed by all parties. Palamas was conscious that he was introducing a new terminology – he appealed to the fourth-century precedent of the introduction of the word *homoousion*⁶² – but he had a valid patristic tradition on his side. It was the spiritual sustenance offered by this tradition in an age of acute anxiety that ensured its victory.

⁶² *Letter to Dionysios* 15; see Sinkewicz 2002: 149.

CHAPTER 30

ORTHODOX MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS INTELLECTUAL ROOTS

ANDREW LOUTH

The “mystical” in current western usage represents a significantly narrower notion than what we find in the Greek Christian thinkers of the Byzantine period. “Mysticism” in current use refers to an experience of union between the human soul and God or the divine. Such experience, it is held, transcends the doctrines and dogmas of traditional religions, and it has frequently been maintained that “mysticism” is something common to all religions or, at least, to quote the well-known words of Richard Zaehner, that “comparison between the mystical writings of quite divergent religions are at least comparisons between like and like.”¹ There are writings from the Byzantine period that can be (and have been) treated in this way, but to do so is to import alien ideas into the Byzantine thought-world, and indeed to narrow the realm of ideas and experience associated with the “mystical.”

THE MYSTICAL AND THE MYSTERIES

In its classical usage, μυστικός simply meant associated with the mysteries: mysteries which involved initiation (μυσταγωγία / *mystagogia*) into the various mystery religions of the classical and Hellenistic world, most famously the Eleusinian Mysteries. What this involved is not at all clear. Maybe it was the sense of being bound together with other initiates by the most important “secret” that was not to be disclosed. Nevertheless, the notion of initiation into the mysteries came to be used as a metaphor for intellectual enlightenment in the philosophical tradition, especially within Platonism. Plato has Diotima begin her exposition of the nature of love (ἔρως / *eros*) to Socrates in the *Symposium* by referring to τὰ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά (*ta telea kai eoptika*), the rites leading to the beholding of the mystery (*Symp.* 210A), and there are similar references in the account of the soul’s recovery of its wings in the myth of the *Phaedrus* (249C, 250C). The first-century Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo develops this reference to the mysteries, distinguishing between lesser and greater

¹ Zaehner 1960: 2.

mysteries: for example, in his exposition of God's appearance to Abraham in Genesis 18, where Abraham beholds three men (or angels), but addresses God in the singular, Philo says that God

presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three; of one when the mind is highly purified and, passing beyond not merely the multiplicity of other numbers, but even the dyad which is next to the unit, presses on to the ideal form which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more; of three when, as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries, it is still a votary only of the minor rites and unable to apprehend the Existent alone by Itself and apart from all else.²

THE CHRISTIAN SENSE OF THE MYSTICAL

In Christian usage, these notions belong to one of the tributaries of the notion of the mystical, but examination of the actual use of the words such as *μυστικός* reveals quite a complex picture. In a seminal article, the late Louis Bouyer demonstrated without much difficulty that the word *μυστικός* is used in patristic Greek in three different ways.³ The first and most common way uses the word to designate the hidden or spiritual – the “mystical” – meaning of Scripture; the second way is in the context of the liturgy, where from the fourth century the word is frequently used to designate liturgical texts and ceremonies, and indeed items of liturgical furniture; the third meaning is least common and refers to the Christian life. What, however, does the word mean in these various contexts? As we have seen, the word itself comes from the Hellenistic mystery religions: the root of the word is *μυ-* which seems to be an onomatopoeic root suggesting – through the keeping together of the lips – silence, a secret kept. The noun *μυστήριον* (*mysterion*) means, most simply, a “secret,” so the adjective *μυστικός* suggests something secret or hidden; the one who initiates others into a secret is a *μυσταγωγός* (*mystagogos*), the one initiated a *μύστης* (*mystes*), and the process of initiation a *μυσταγωγία* (*mystagogia*). There is certainly an increase in the use of such terminology by Christians in the fourth century when, to prevent the Christian faith being dissolved by the influx of the half-converted, the Church seems deliberately to have enhanced the awe-inspiring aspect of the Christian liturgy, not least the liturgy of Christian initiation.⁴ But Bouyer argued that the similarity to the Hellenistic mystery religions is superficial, and the real context of this language quite different. At its heart is the understanding of Christ as the divine *μυστήριον*: an idea central to the epistles of the Apostle Paul. This secret is a secret that has been told but despite that it remains a secret, because what has been declared cannot be simply grasped, since it is *God's*

² Philo, *De Abr.* 122; Colson 1935: 65. ³ Bouyer 1956. ⁴ Yarnold 1971.

secret, and God is beyond human comprehension. The secret of the Gospel is the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. For Christians, the whole of what they came to call the “Old Testament” finds its true meaning in Christ. God’s plan for humanity to which the Scriptures bear witness is made plain in the Incarnation. And this is the most common context, as we have seen, for the use of the word *mystikos*: it refers therefore to the hidden meaning of the Scriptures, the true meaning that is revealed in Christ, a meaning that remains mysterious, for it is no simple message, but the life in Christ that is endless in its implications. Christians, however, share in the life in Christ preeminently through the sacraments – μυστήρια (*mysteria*) in Greek – and the word μυστικός (*mystikos*) is used therefore in relation to the sacraments as a way of designating the hidden reality, encountered and shared through the sacraments. The final use of the word μυστικός refers to the hidden reality of the life of baptized Christians, a reality which is, as St. Paul put it, “hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

If the “mysticism” of the Fathers is what these various uses of μυστικός refer to, then it is very different from what we call mysticism nowadays: it refers not to some elite group, or elite practice, within Christianity, but simply to the lived reality of Christianity itself. It is not something separate from the institutions of Christianity: it is the meaning that these institutions enshrine. It is not something distinct from the dogmas of Christianity, for the “mystical” meaning of Scripture, in this sense, is often enough precisely such dogmas. “Mystical” and “sacramental,” from this perspective, are interchangeable, which is hardly surprising, as *sacramentum* is the Latin word used to translate μυστήριον.

As we shall see, these three dimensions of the “mystical” remain tangible throughout the Byzantine period. It is, however, easiest to make the last meaning of the “mystical” the main concern of this chapter, for it is here that the “intellectual roots” are most clearly discerned. The threefold valency of the term mystical also warns us against a misunderstanding offered by the notion of “intellectual roots,” for the roots of the mystical lie not in the intellectual scaffolding we shall largely be concerned with, but in the various ways in which a deeper encounter with God came to be conceived.

THE ROOTS OF THE MYSTICAL

Perhaps we should start with the question of the “roots” of the mystical in the experience of the Byzantines. The real roots lie in their understanding of how the human responds to the love of God manifest in the Incarnation. This response is soon conceived of as “deification,” and Athanasios’ affirmation that the Word of God “became human, that we might become divine” (*De incarn.* 54) becomes a frequent refrain. This is a transformation, or more

precisely the restoration of what God had intended the human to be. The realm of the mystical is concerned with what this process of deification entails. In attempting to understand it, the Byzantines drew on various traditions. An obvious one is the Platonic tradition with its sense that the goal of the human is ὁμοίωσις θεῷ (*homoiosis theō*), assimilation to God (*Theaet.* 176B), and the various ways in which Plato understood this goal to be achieved, as well as the development of this Platonic tradition by later Platonists, notably Plotinos, with his understanding of the return of the soul to the One. This tradition is indeed fundamental for the Byzantines, and its influence profound. There are, however, other traditions on which this emerging mystical tradition drew. One, of which much has been made in recent research, is the way in which the early monastic tradition drew on Jewish apocalyptic.

Jewish apocalyptic – a tradition that emerges in late Second Temple Judaism – is concerned with a future revelation of God, heralding the end times. Daniel 7–12, Old Testament pseudepigrapha such as *I and II Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the Christian *Apocalypse of John* (the last book of the New Testament) are examples of such apocalyptic literature. The final revelation of the vision of God, the *angelus interpres*, the sense of evolving mystery: all these are drawn on to understand the Christian, and especially monastic, experience of progress toward deification and the vision of God. It has become customary to speak of monasticism as “interiorized apocalyptic.”⁵ Other Jewish traditions are drawn on, notably the tradition of what is known as Merkavah mysticism. In a brief treatment like this there is no opportunity to go into detail; nevertheless it is worth stressing that these different traditions should be thought of not as conflicting, but rather as complementary. Let us take a couple of examples of such complementarity, and at the same time introduce themes that will exercise us in what follows.

CONVERGING TRADITIONS

The first of the *Fifty Homilies* ascribed to Makarios is concerned with Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot of the Cherubim related in Ezekiel 1. The homily explains that

the mystery which [the prophet] beheld was that of the soul, that was to receive her Lord, and to become a throne of glory for Him. For the soul that is irradiated by the beauty of the unspeakable glory of Him who has prepared her to be a seat and dwelling for Himself, becomes all light, all face, all eye; and there is no part of her that is not full of the spiritual eyes of light.⁶

⁵ Golitzin 2001a. ⁶ Makarios, *Homily* 1.2, in Mason 1921: 2.

A little later we are told that

The four living creatures which bore the chariot were a symbol of the ruling faculties of the soul. As the eagle is the king of birds, and the lion of wild beasts, and the bull of tame ones, and man of creatures in general, so the soul also has its ruling faculties. They are the will, the conscience, the intellect, the loving power . . . According to another interpretation the symbolism is applied to the church of the saints in heaven.⁷

It makes good sense to see here some sort of influence of the Merkavah texts. However, a glance at the references in the *apparatus criticus* of the standard edition reveals that there are plenty of parallels here with the Christian Platonism of Clement and Origen of Alexandria, and it is most likely that they drew on Platonic sources, such as the myth of soul as a chariot in the *Phaedrus*. It seems to me entirely likely that the author of the *Homilies* is availing himself of both of these traditions.

Another issue in the ascent of the soul to the divine is a widespread apprehension that, though the soul may prepare for this ascent, the final encounter and union with the divine is not something that is within the powers of the soul itself. In the Platonic tradition this is expressed by the conviction that the final revelation of the ultimate (the form of the Good, in later Platonic traditions God) occurs ἐξαίφνης (*exaiφnes*) – a word that conveys a sense both of suddenness and immediacy (see *Symp.* 210E, *Ep.* 7: 341 CD). Dionysios the Areopagite devotes a short epistle to the meaning of the word: it refers to the hiddenness of God in his manifestation, even in his manifestation as Incarnate: “he is hidden with his manifestation, or, to speak more divinely, even in his manifestation” (*Ep.* 3 in *PG* 3:1069B). The Platonic background seems evident, but there is another passage that Dionysios may well have in mind: Malachi 3:1, “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly (ἐξαίφνης) come to the temple.” This, too, would fit with Dionysios’ thought, relating especially to the liturgical aspect of his understanding of the encounter between the human and the divine. Furthermore, it has been pointed out by Alexander Golitzin that ἐξαίφνης occurs several times in the New Testament. Paul’s converting vision happens “suddenly” (Acts 9:3, 22:6), at the birth of Christ the angelic choir appears “suddenly” (Luke 2:13), and at the second coming Christ will appear “suddenly” (Mark 13:36).⁸ Dionysios presented Paul as his mentor; the other references link up with Christ, Incarnate and to come again. Ἐξαίφνης for Dionysios has the Platonic overtones of sudden, immediate disclosure, but there is also a sense of the hiddenness of Christ’s manifestation in the Incarnation and at the end of time; furthermore this manifestation has an ecclesial dimension.

⁷ *Ibid.* 1.3, in Mason 1921: 2–3. ⁸ Golitzin 2001b: 487.

“MAKARIOS” AND EVAGRIOS

It can be maintained that the Byzantine ascetical and mystical tradition has its immediate literary sources in two, nearly contemporary, bodies of writing: the so-called Makarian homilies (of Syrian provenance, despite their ascription to Makarios of Egypt) and the Evagrian corpus. The scholarship of the last century associated the Makarian homilies with the Messalian movement, condemned by several local councils and finally at the third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431). It is now generally maintained that, though the homilies were popular among the Messalians, the homilies themselves are free from any taint of Messalianism.⁹ Nevertheless, some of the characteristic emphases of the Messalians are to be found in the Makarian Homilies: since the Fall human nature finds it impossible to turn to God in any consistent way; all one can do is pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit who will bring one a genuine experience of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit is felt and brings assurance. The Homilies explore both the fragmented nature of fallen human nature and the extraordinary sense of transformation brought about by the presence of the Holy Spirit, an experience that is manifest as light flooding the human person: he becomes “all light, all face, all eye,” as we have already seen in the first of the homilies.

The Evagrian corpus is, on the face of it, very different. Whereas the Makarian homilies contain a mysticism of feeling, the Evagrian corpus has an understanding of progress in the spiritual life, whereby the intellect, the *nous*, frees itself from the fluctuating feelings of the bodily nature and attains a state in which it is able to contemplate God. Although Evagrios (d. 399) was condemned for being too close for comfort to the metaphysical notions of Origen – decisively at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II (553) – nevertheless he remained an influential figure among the monks of Byzantium (and even more so further afield, among the Syriac-speaking monks who soon found themselves living under Islam, and the Armenian monks, who had never been part of the empire). Among Armenians, Evagrios is revered as a saint. Some works survived under his own name and others circulated under the names of others, especially his younger, near-contemporary Neilos. Evagrios’ popularity lies in his adapting the world view of Origen to provide a metaphysical backdrop that made great sense of the monastic life – that, and the intensely practical nature of his teaching, which the monks were loath to relinquish.

⁹ Fitschen 1998.

ORIGENISM

It is worth giving a brief sketch of the metaphysical vision that attracted Evagrius. Origen's own vision saw the spiritual world of rational beings as created to form a primal henad, bound to God by an act of contemplation. The Fall occurred as the contemplation of these rational beings wavered. Origen seems to have put this down to the experience of satiety, contemplation becoming eventually too much of a good thing, as it were. As their attention wavered, rational beings fell into a material cosmos, created by God to arrest their fall, by providing material bodies. The fall of the rational beings was in accordance with the seriousness of their abandonment of contemplation. For some, whose attention wavered but slightly, angelic bodies awaited them; others, whose lack of attention amounted to rejection of God, became demons; in between were humans, who fell into human bodies. The experience of corporeality was a shock to the fallen souls, and that shock was the beginning of a process whereby they would return to union with God through recovered contemplation. The heart of the process of return was the renewal of the capacity for attention to God, which enabled prayer (Evagrius is fond of wordplay made possible in the Greek between the words for attention and prayer: προσοχή and προσευχή / *prosoche* and *proseuche*). Such an understanding of the nature and destiny of the soul made eminent sense of the monastic life dedicated to prayer. It suggested an understanding of the soul's plight that corresponded well with monastic experience. The struggle of the soul was due to its linkage with the body, which both brings home to the soul its fallen state and provides the arena, as it were, for the soul's struggle to return to union with God. For it is through the body that the soul is bound up with the material world (both literally – the world perceived through the senses – and metaphorically – the world of human cares and concerns). It is therefore with the body that the soul has to struggle.

I have included this sketch of Origen's worldview, for it was this that attracted many of the more thoughtful monks, preeminent among whom was Evagrius.¹⁰ What was quickly perceived to be unacceptable about this worldview was its conviction of a primal spiritual unity, embracing the whole spiritual world, which seemed to entail a belief in the preexistence of souls, held to be too close to pagan Platonism, and what seemed to be a further entailment, viz., that the ranks of angels, humans, and demons were only temporary, and that ultimately the primal unity would be restored, and all, even the devil himself, saved. In the fourth century, we observe several attempts to preserve the main features of this Origenist worldview, while correcting its unacceptable aspects. A good example can

¹⁰ Konstantinovsky 2008.

be found in Athanasios' early treatise *Against the Pagans*, which preserves a sense that the soul's nature is fundamentally contemplative. Similar attempts can be found in the Cappadocian Fathers. What is characteristic of all these attempts to preserve the main outlines of Origenism is a conviction that all that exists has been created out of nothing by God – for Origen *creatio ex nihilo* applied only to the material world – and a conviction that the human being is a soul–body unity, in which soul and body are coeval; there is also a sense, not always clearly focused, of the stability of the angelic orders.

EVAGRIOS' VISION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΗ, ΦΥΣΙΚΗ,
ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ (PRAKTIKE, PHYSIKE, THEOLOGIA)

What Evagrius maintained is not entirely clear, as his more speculative works do not survive in Greek and the Syriac versions, made a century or more after his death, reflect later controversies, but it seems likely that Evagrius preserved much more of Origen's scheme than Athanasios or the Cappadocians (though, as his modern defenders point out, Evagrius had been a disciple of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzos, and could well reflect their views). His was certainly a contemplative view of the nature of the soul, and a conviction that through contemplation human beings were fulfilling a role in holding the cosmos in unity with God: the monastic pursuit was not just an individual matter, but of benefit for the cosmos. Whatever Evagrius preserved of the metaphysical system of Origen, however, at least as important was what he made of the nature of the human quest for prayer and union with God. Developing hints in Clement and Origen, and drawing on the accumulating wisdom of the Egyptian monks with whom he spent the last two decades or so of his life, Evagrius distinguished three stages in the spiritual life, which he called ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΗ (*praktike*), ΦΥΣΙΚΗ (*physike*), and ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ (*theologia*) – a stage of doing (which might be called ascetic struggle), a stage of contemplation of the nature of things, and then, beyond that, contemplation of God himself.

ASCETIC STRUGGLE OR ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΗ (PRAKTIKE)

Ascetic struggle or ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΗ was perhaps the stage for which Evagrius was most valued by Byzantine monks. It is the stage in which the monk (or the Christian) struggles to detach himself from the world. Analyzing this, Evagrius draws on a basically Platonic understanding of the soul. In the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* – and elsewhere – Plato had presented the soul as consisting of three parts, two lower, irrational parts and a rational part. The lowest of the irrational parts he called ἐπιθυμητική (*epithymetike*), the desiring part, manifesting itself in our desire for food, drink, sexual union,

as well as for wealth and power; above that was θυμική (*thymike*), which represents psychic energy, the capacity to be “incensed,” to flare out with anger. The higher part of the soul he variously called “rational” (λογικός, λογιστικός / *logikos, logistikos*) or the νοῦς (*nous*), intellect. The aim of the spiritual life is to subdue the irrational parts, at the very least bring them under the control of the rational part, but more usually to make them quiescent so that the higher, rational part is undisturbed. Having done that, the intellect can learn to contemplate without distraction, and eventually come to union with God. Evagrius catalogued the ways in which the soul can be drawn away from the spiritual pursuit of union with God. He thought of the soul as struggling against demons, these demons corresponding to the various ways in which the soul can be pushed about, as it were, by its feelings. Evagrius concentrated on what he called λογισμοί (*logismoi*), usually translated “thoughts” but meaning more like “trains of thought.” These λογισμοί are inspired by demons; Evagrius’ consideration of all this parallels the demons and λογισμοί to such an extent that they are almost interchangeable. There are, for Evagrius, eight classes of λογισμοί, or demons, which are concerned with: gluttony, avarice, sexual temptation or lust (πορνεία / *porneia*), anger, grief, and listlessness (ἀκηδία / *akedia*), vainglory, and pride. It is in his discussion of these λογισμοί that Evagrius demonstrates his psychological acumen, for which the monks prized him. Gluttony, for instance, is not about dreaming of wonderful banquets, with rich food and fine wines, but rather about the way in which the monk may start to worry about his health, owing to his ascetic diet: might he not be damaging his health, which cannot be a good thing, and should he not, as a result, return to the world? It is not just a thought, but a train of thought that the monk cannot rid himself of: instead of praying, he finds himself worrying. A good deal of the genius of Evagrius is the way he recognizes the wiliness of the demons. The cure is as much to realize what is going on, rather than prescribe any specific remedy.

The aim of this struggle against λογισμοί, temptations, is gradually to cease to be bothered by them, to attain a state of serenity, which Evagrius called ἀπάθεια / *apatheia*, “passionlessness,” by which he does not mean indifference, but a state in which one can pray without being constantly drawn away from prayer by the activity of one’s thoughts. Once the monk has attained ἀπάθεια, his intellect, νοῦς (*nous*), can attend, can contemplate. The monk then enters on the second stage of natural contemplation, in which he can behold the created order serenely, without wanting to make use of it; he can see the beauty in the world without being moved to an urge to take pleasure in it, or possess it. What is most important about this stage is that the νοῦς is learning to contemplate, to pray, to exercise its natural state. Beyond this lies contemplation of God, which for Evagrius means essentially passing from being concerned with thoughts, not

λογισμοί, but νοήματα (*noemata*). Passing beyond these means leaving behind attachment to the many to find the ability of focus on the One.

The intellectual scaffolding of Evagrius' thought is fundamentally Platonic. It is interesting that even those who were expressly opposed to Plato, the great pagan philosopher, seem to have little difficulty in accepting an understanding of the soul that evidently owes so much to Plato. The debt goes deeper than his understanding of the make-up of the soul. As the intellect moves closer to God, it enters into a more united state. Union with God means the intellect's attaining a state of oneness. Themes from Plotinos are easily accepted.

The legacy of Evagrius remained both bewitching and contested. It is not possible to enter into much detail here, but let us explore a couple of themes. They mostly concern neither the way Evagrius analyzed ascetic struggle, which remains broadly accepted, nor the way in which νοῦς is thought of as the fundamental spiritual organ (which I think is because prayer is fundamentally understood not as a spiritual exercise but the way in which the human engages with reality, comes to *know*, attains a state of νόησις (*noesis*), so that to think of the spiritual centre of the human as νοῦς seems natural); both these points were entirely acceptable within the Byzantine ascetical tradition. The first concerns the nature of the God encountered in the spiritual life; the second the place and understanding of experience.

GOD WHO "DWELLS IN UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT"

In the Platonic tradition, the soul's ascent to the divine is premised on the conviction that there is a fundamental kinship between the soul and the divine; in more developed forms of Platonism, the soul, in union with the One, recovers its own primal unity. The growing awareness in Christian intellectual circles in the fourth century of the paramount importance of seeing the whole created order as brought into being out of nothing by God yields a sense that ultimately there is no natural kinship between the soul and God. There is *some* kinship, otherwise – given the epistemological premise that like is known by like – the soul could never know God at all; however, this kinship is not at the level of being, but rather at the level of the human being in the image of God, a matter of relationship rather than being. Union with God is, then, union with One who is utterly different – so different that, at the level of being, there is no continuity. Gregory of Nyssa was the first to explore the consequences of this by developing two fundamental postulates: first of all, union with God is not a realization of a fundamental kinship, union of light with light, as it were, but rather an encounter with God in utter darkness. One of Gregory of Nyssa's fundamental models of the spiritual life takes the life of Moses as

archetypal (in this following Philo and Clement of Alexandria), and exploits the fundamental ambiguities of the biblical account of Moses. In his ascent of Mount Sinai, Moses does not encounter God directly, but “enters into the darkness where God was” (εἰς τὸν γνόφον οὗ ἦν ὁ θεός; Exodus 20:21). The darkness expresses the fundamental unknowability of God, which is underlined by Moses finding himself in the place where God was, not in direct union with him. Gregory developed this latter denial of any final union with God into the conviction that in the encounter with God there is no consummating union, but rather (and again picking up ideas from Clement of Alexandria) to know God is to follow after him. “For the desire of the ascending [soul] never rests in what is known, but through that which is ever greater, one desire constantly yields to another more exalted, and in its ascent the soul is always led through what is higher towards the infinite.”¹¹ This is what is often called Gregory’s doctrine of *epektasis*.¹²

The idea that in its ascent to God the soul plunges into ever deeper darkness and comes to know that God is unknowable finds its most succinct and influential expression in Dionysios the Areopagite’s *Mystical Theology*, which, in its first chapter, takes Moses’ ascent of Sinai as archetypal of an ever-deepening human encounter with God, although Dionysios seems to find in this darkness an experience of ecstasy in love, rather than Gregory’s *epektasis*. It is important to note that Dionysios’ *Mystical Theology* cannot be reduced to the mystical treatise the western Middle Ages took it to be. Moses’ ascent is shaped by the liturgical language of the Christian priest ascending to the altar, which makes unavoidable the conviction that what Dionysios is talking about in all his treatises has a fundamental location in the Christian liturgy.¹³

Experience: πείρα (peira)

This interweaving of the personal spiritual life and the liturgical life of the Church becomes completely unavoidable in the works of the greatest Byzantine theologian, Maximos the Confessor. In his account of the Divine Liturgy, the *Mystagogia*, the performance of the Divine Liturgy and the soul’s progress to union with God are explicitly placed in parallel, so that they mutually inform each other. In *Mystagogia* 4, Maximos already suggests a parallel between the human and the Church building, with the nave corresponding to the body, the sanctuary to the soul, and the altar to the intellect, or νοῦς. In *Myst.* 5, Maximos takes further the analogy

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on the Song of Songs (In canticum canticorum)* 8, in Langerbeck 1960: 247.14–18.

¹² Cf. *Phil.* 3:13, quoted Langerbeck 1960: 245.15–16. ¹³ Rorem 1989.

between the nave and the sanctuary, paralleling them to the active and contemplative aspects of the soul. The active faculty of the soul is concerned with the pursuit of the Good, and moves toward it through the exercise of reason, leading to moral wisdom, practice leading to virtue, and then faith, and finally the Good (λόγος / *logos*, φρόνησις / *phronesis*, πράξις / *praxis*, ἀρετή / *arete*, πίστις / *pistis*, ἀγαθόν / *agathon*). The contemplative faculty moves in parallel with the intellect seeking out wisdom, leading to contemplation, knowledge and abiding knowledge,¹⁴ and finally to the Truth (νοῦς / *nous*, σοφία / *sophia*, θεωρία / *theoria*, γνῶσις / *gnosis*, ἀληκτος γνῶσις / *alektos gnosis*, ἀλήθεια / *aletheia*). Not only is there a parallel between, and mutual dependence of, the pursuit of the good and the search for the truth, there is a further one between the liturgical action and the spiritual quest. Maximos devoted much time to the exploration of the modalities of the spiritual life, but here I want to draw attention to just one aspect of all this. In *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, as well as setting the ascetic quest in the context of the mystery of Christ understood as preexisting, and indeed prefiguring, the cosmos, Maximos makes a distinction (or finds the Scriptures making a distinction) between two kinds of knowledge (γνώσις / *gnosis*) of divine things. On the one hand there is relative (σχετική / *schetike*) knowledge, “rooted only in reason and ideas, and lacking the kind of experiential perception (διὰ πείρας . . . αἴσθησις / *dia peiras . . . aisthesis*) of what one knows through active engagement”: the knowledge we use to conduct our daily lives. On the other, there is

that truly authentic knowledge (τὴν δὲ κυρίως ἀληθινήν), gained only by actual experience (ἐν μόνῃ τῇ πείρᾳ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν), apart from reason and ideas, which provides a total perception (ὄλην . . . τὴν αἴσθησιν) of the known object through a participation by grace (κατὰ χάριν μεθέξει). By this latter knowledge, we attain, in the future state, the supernatural deification (τὴν ὑπὲρ φύσιν . . . θέωσιν) that remains unceasingly in effect.

This distinction, says Maximos, citing the authority of the “wise” (σοφοί / *sophoi*), is such that “it is impossible for rational knowledge of God to coexist with the direct experience (πεῖρα / *peira*) of God, or for conceptual knowledge (νόησις / *noesis*) to coexist with immediate perception (αἴσθησις / *aisthesis*) of God.” He clarifies what he means by affirming that

by “rational knowledge of God” (λόγος περὶ θεοῦ) I mean the use of the analogy of created beings in the intellectual contemplation (γνωστικὴ θεωρία) of God; by “perception” I mean the experience, through participation, of the goods beyond nature; by “conceptual knowledge” (νόησις) I mean the simple and unitary knowledge of God drawn from created beings.

¹⁴ Cf. pseudo-Dionysios, *Divine Names* 4.35.

What matters for Maximos is perception (for which he uses the word αἴσθησις / *aisthesis*, as we have seen) based on experience through participation. Even highly refined conceptual knowledge based on reason has no value, and is excluded by genuine πείρα / *peira*, experience. It is through experience that one gains true apophatic knowledge of God, a knowledge to which reason has no access, for any knowledge entertained by reason has to be denied.

Maximos and φυσική (physike)

This passage in Maximos is of great interest, for Maximos is not one shy of theological argument. To read this passage (and others like it) in an anti-intellectualist way seems implausible. Nevertheless, the emphasis on experience (πείρα / *peira*) in Maximos is not at all uncharacteristic. Maximos follows closely Evagrius' tripartite understanding of the spiritual life – πρακτική, φυσική, θεολογία – at each stage developing Evagrius' ideas (and correcting the metaphysical undergirding). His understanding of φυσική (*physike*) is elaborated with his "signature doctrine" of the λόγοι (*logoi*) of creation. The metaphysical significance of the λόγοι is explained elsewhere (see Chapters 19 and 24). Maximos understands φυσική, as does Evagrius, as the stage where the νοῦς begins to practice contemplation of the λόγοι of creation. At this stage the intellect begins to understand the nature of the created order and the divine economy. The frequency with which Maximos returns to this doctrine suggests that φυσική was more than a transitional stage. Contemplation of the created order and its meaning was, for him, of intrinsic value, but not independent value. Only as purified was the νοῦς able to understand the created order. When Thunberg compares Maximos' understanding of the λόγοι of creation with a scientific understanding of the universe, this must not be overlooked.¹⁵ For Maximos the principal aim of φυσική is to enable the intellect to contemplate the λόγοι of creation, and through them to participate in the one Λόγος as a stage towards θεολογία (*theologia*), where the intellect is united with God himself.

REASONING AND EXPERIENCE

There is, however, a tension here, implicit perhaps in the way in which mystical theology takes over ways of understanding the intellect and in its function as an organ of knowing from the Platonic tradition. How far can the reasoning powers of the soul, as precisely *reasoning* powers, avail in the soul's search for knowledge of God? This became an issue in the so-called

¹⁵ Thunberg 1985: 132–137.

Hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century, and is one of the threads that run throughout this controversy.

The beginning of the controversy between Gregory Palamas and the monk Barlaam concerned the vexed question at the heart of Orthodox–Catholic relations, the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed. This rapidly developed into a controversy over the so-called Hesychast monks who claimed through their practice of the prayer of the heart to experience the uncreated light of the Godhead, i.e. God himself directly. Barlaam dismissed these claims as hallucinatory: God remained unknowable, though a certain knowledge of God could be gained from the created order. Barlaam, Palamas claims (the earliest writings of Barlaam are lost), maintains that there are λόγοι of created beings in the “divine, first, and creative mind,” and that in our soul there are images (εἰκόνες / *eikones*) of these λόγοι, and that through the exercise of reason (“distinguishing, syllogistic, and analytical methods”) we can dispel our ignorance and thus be “according to the likeness of the One who made [us].”¹⁶ The first of Palamas’ *Triads* is devoted to refuting this, appealing to Paul’s rhetorical question, “Who can know the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11:34). Later on in the *Triads*, Fr. Maximos of Simonopetra notes, Palamas passes over a reference to the λόγοι in a citation from Dionysios, and comments that Palamas seems unable to make anything of Maximos’ doctrine of the λόγοι, maybe because of Barlaam’s allusion to this doctrine, thus missing an opportunity of “developing Maximos’ doctrine of the *logoi* into an Orthodox *analogia entis*,” though, as we have seen, Maximos’ doctrine of the λόγοι could not be used to support the apparently independent use of reason that Barlaam seems to envisage.¹⁷ To what he claims is Barlaam’s dependence on logic and reasoning Gregory opposes a non-conceptual knowledge of God based on experience, something along the lines of what we have already found in Maximos. In one of his letters to Barlaam, Gregory exclaims,

It is not safe for those who do not know how to speak to God to speak about God, nor for those to judge about the immaterial light who do not know what can be apprehended beyond the light, and have not been initiated into the intellectual part of the soul and “the life hidden in Christ” by the true and intellectual light, as having truly found and been raised to the first resurrection.¹⁸

“Speaking to God” means prayer, the experience of prayer. Without this, speaking about God is “not safe.” In affirming the authenticity of the Hesychast monks’ experience of God in prayer, Palamas seemed to qualify

¹⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Triad* I, first question, in Meyendorff 1973: 5–7.

¹⁷ Simonopetrites 2013: 44–46.

¹⁸ Gregory Palamas, *Ep. 1 to Barlaam* 41, in Chrestou 1962: 248–249.

the unknowability of God. To safeguard this fundamental premise, Gregory eventually derives from the patristic tradition a distinction with the Godhead between his essence (οὐσία / *ousia*), which is unknowable, and his activities (ἐνέργειαι / *energeiai*, usually [mis]translated “energies”), in which God is known. This becomes Gregory’s settled way of reconciling experience of God with his unknowability, at least from the third *Triad* on. Earlier he had explored other, biblical ways of making such a distinction, for example the distinction between God’s essence and his glory.

THE LIGHT OF TABOR

The monks claimed to behold the uncreated light of the Godhead, as the Apostles had done on Mount Tabor, the mountain of the Transfiguration, which spawned controversy about the nature of the uncreated light. At the centre of his longest *Ambiguum*, Maximos had discussed the Transfiguration, and his discussion became a quarry for arguments in defense of the Hesychasts. In that *Ambiguum*, Maximos had distinguished between the light that shone from the face of Christ, a light so dazzling that the disciples could not behold it, and the light that radiated from his garments, a light Maximos interpreted in terms of the λόγοι, both of Scripture and creation: the vision of the Face of Christ apophatically reveals God’s essence while the λόγοι of Scripture and creation kataphatically reveal truths concerning God and the divine economy.¹⁹ There is constant recourse to Maximos’ discussion in defending the Hesychasts, though the exigencies of controversy meant that attention was focused on particular points, such as Maximos’ use of σύμβολον (*symbolon*), and the wider issues envisaged by Maximos rather ignored.

The Hesychast controversy, focusing as it did on the experience of solitary hermits, might suggest that by the fourteenth century the wholeness of the mystical, embracing the inner meaning of Scripture, the sacramental life, as well as a deep spiritual life, had been dissipated and reduced to something like the “mysticism” found in the contemporary west. The continued wholeness of the mystical in Byzantium becomes apparent as one realizes that one of Palamas’ staunchest supporters was his fellow Thessalonikan, Nicholas Kabasilas. Kabasilas’ two great works, his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* and his *Life in Christ*, present an understanding of the Christian life focused on the sacraments. Without denying Hesychasm, it places the experience of the Athonite monks in the context of the whole sacramental life of the Church.²⁰

¹⁹ Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, in *PG* 91:1125D–1128A. ²⁰ Bobrinsky 1968.

CHAPTER 31
KABBALAH IN BYZANTIUM

MOSHE IDEL

BYZANTIUM: A CENTER OF KABBALAH

There can be no doubt that Jewish culture in Byzantium was important both in its own right and for transmitting earlier Jewish material from the Middle East to central and western Europe, already in the ninth century. We know this for instance from evidence relating to the centers of Jewish culture in southern Italy, especially Bari, that were then parts of the Byzantine cultural milieu.¹ However, specific information about original mystical compositions in Byzantium are not available (at least for the time being) before the emergence of the Kabbalah in later medieval times, and the situation is not very clear even afterwards. This chapter will offer a general picture of the development of the Kabbalah in Byzantium,² on the basis of the findings of previous scholars, mainly E. Gottlieb and M. Kushnir-Oron, as well as my own. It will deal solely with literature considered to be kabbalistic, namely medieval material, and not with earlier Jewish mystical literature (i.e. the so-called *Heikhalot* or liturgical poetry), or with magical literature found in this area, even if elements of these literatures did find their way into kabbalistic works.

Given that research in this field is in its initial stages, part of the ensuing discussion will try to ascertain the time and place of kabbalistic compositions made in Byzantium. This is necessary for the presentation of the Byzantine literature as a discrete corpus, to be set apart to a certain degree from other centers of Kabbalah. By bringing together the compositions that we are going to consider Byzantine, a new perspective on the history of the Kabbalah will emerge, emphasizing the role of Byzantium among other important centers, and their special characteristics, as well as the power struggles between these centers.

¹ Idel 2011a: 5–11. On the transmission of Jewish material from the Byzantine center to western Europe see Ta-Shma 2005: 177–201; Idel 2006: 47–94; Laderman 2013.

² Kabbalah refers to the reception and elaboration of esoteric doctrines of Judaism. The formation of the Kabbalistic body of writings and beliefs is commonly associated with intellectual developments in medieval Europe and the Renaissance, though its transmission often crosses the boundaries of historiographical fields. Kabbalah also relies on mystical experience, i.e. knowledge that cannot be directly demonstrated through philosophical language [Ed.].

R. ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S STAY IN BYZANTIUM

The first Kabbalist to compose kabbalistic works on Byzantine soil and who even actively disseminated his Kabbalah there was R. Abraham ben Shmuel Abulafia (1240–c. 1291). Though born in Navarra, he traveled much and visited Greece twice: once toward the beginning of the 1260s, before he was actually involved in Kabbalah, and the second time during the second half of the 1270s, a few years after he had studied Kabbalah and was already subject to mystical experiences. He appears to have visited several places there, including the Greek cities of Thebes, Chalkis, and Patras. The period of his stay was approximately 1274–1279. It is likely that *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, one of his three commentaries on the secrets in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, was then composed in Greece. If this assumption is correct, then this book should be considered as one of the first kabbalistic books to ever be composed in Greece. Another treatise of his entitled *Sefer ha-Melammed*, the *Book of the Teacher*, was composed in 1276, most probably in Byzantium.³ And three years later he started a new type of kabbalistic genre: prophetic books, on which he wrote commentaries too. In his commentary on the fourth prophetic book, when he was in Patras, we read that:

This book⁴ is the third commentary on the fourth Book [of Prophecy],⁵ for Raziel⁶ composed [his] first [prophetic book], the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, while in the city of Patras, in the country of Greece, in the year 5039 of Creation. He was then 39 years old.⁷

According to Abulafia, he started to compose his prophetic books in Patras, where he had a revelation similar in content to the one he had experienced nine years earlier, in Barcelona in 1270, when he started to study Kabbalah. That earlier revelation constituted a formative experience for both his prophetic and messianic consciousness and his ensuing literary activities, which did include kabbalistic works. And yet at that time he did not produce any prophetic works. It would seem that in the years following his relatively short stay in Barcelona he experienced additional revelations, and the initial composition of his prophetic works bears testimony to their renewal and intensification. Moreover, these revelations also bore a mission for the Kabbalist whose time was getting closer: he was to seek an audience

³ Idel 1976: 1.

⁴ The book is *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ* (*The Book of Testimony*), one of Abulafia's prophetic works.

⁵ Abulafia wrote commentaries on his own (now lost in their original form) prophetic works, but in reverse order of their composition.

⁶ In *gematria* Raziel = Abraham = 248. This is the most important of the theophoric names that Abulafia adopted for himself, and is ubiquitous especially in his prophetic works.

⁷ *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ*, ms. Munich 43, fol. 203b, previously printed according to three manuscript variants in Idel 1988a: 58–59; cf. Abulafia 2001: 57.

with the pope on the Jewish New Year in the summer of 1280. We may surmise the city of Patras was the last though longest stop of his second visit to Greece and that he had already visited two other cities there. Abulafia deemed Prophetic or Ecstatic Kabbalah as superior to the Kabbalah of other Kabbalists.⁸ Consequently, compared to his kabbalistic works composed while still in Spain, and maybe one or more in Greece, *Sefer ha-Yashar* was considered by him to be a step up to a new level of creativity in his own literary development.

What is the meaning of the title *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which Abulafia gave to his first book of prophecy? The title is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Joshua 10:13) as a lost book and it means *The Book of the Righteous*. There is a connection between this title and Abulafia's self-perception as an author of a hagiographic work in the strictest sense of the term, meaning the book that was to be read in the synagogue after the Torah reading as the hagiographic portion of the week, or *Haftarah*; hence his last composition was aptly entitled *Sefer ha-Haftarah*.⁹ The title *Sefer ha-Yashar* (the main subject of our discussion) alludes to the fact that this first prophetic book is similar in nature to the Torah, and this in my opinion is made clear by a play of words found in the *Sefer ha-Yashar: Har Patros* [the mountain of Patras] = *Sefer Torah*.¹⁰ This hubris seems to be connected to the theophoric names that this prophetic Kabbalist characteristically called himself in these works, *Raziel* – the secrets of God – and *Berakhiyahu* – the Blessed of God. Indeed, it becomes clear that Abulafia surmised that he was granted revelations that were to serve as a prototype of a New Torah. The angel that reveals to him told the Kabbalist:

For a new Torah I will innovate amongst the holy nation, the nation is the people of Israel, which is my sublime Name that is like a New Torah. This Name was not explained to my people since the day that I hid my face from them. Although it is a hidden Name, it can [now] be explained. Then he commanded me to hide no more His Name from those who inquire after it in truth.¹¹

Here the New Torah contains a specific content, the identification of a divine Name. This New Torah includes also the hermeneutical methods mentioned in the beginning of the passage. On the other hand, Abulafia

⁸ Idel 2003. Prophetic or Ecstatic Kabbalah refers to the endeavor to achieve unity with God by means of “the science of combination” of letters developed by Abraham Abulafia (1240–post 1291). As Gershom Scholem notes (1974: 180), “this mystical discipline made use of the letters of the alphabet, and especially of the Tetragrammaton and the other Names of God, for the purpose of training in meditation. By immersing himself in various combinations of letters and names, the kabbalist emptied his mind of all natural forms that might prevent his concentrating on divine matters. In this way he freed his soul of its natural restraints and opened it to the divine influx, with whose aid he might even attain to prophecy” [Ed.].

⁹ Idel 1976: 14. ¹⁰ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in Abulafia 2001: 98.

¹¹ *Commentary on Sefer ha-Haftarah*, ms. Rome-Angelica 38, fol. 37a; in Abulafia 2001: 113.

describes his last prophetic work, *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, also as *Sefer ha-Besorah*,¹² the title meant to be a pun on the term *Evangelion*, the Christian Gospel, seemingly an attempt to argue for the superiority of his revelation over the Christian one.

The theme of the disclosure of the hidden Name in his revelation in Patras can be discerned from the following passage:¹³

Then afterwards Raziel saw a vision in which he attained the secret of the Name and the secret of prophecy and the essence of its truth. And he said, at the time Five [H] was to bring him to Dibbon, this was in the sixth year [W] of his departure from Sefarad [Spain], in the tenth [Y] [month] which is called Tevet, on the fifth [H] day wherein, behold the secret of the Name was revealed. Also *Patros*, *sefirot*, *shemot*,¹⁴ and this [wordplay] continued and he mentioned the blessing. And then he began [to reveal the secret of] the Name, said Raziel: And YY ‘Elohai [My God] sent His angel before me and showed me “the paths of His Name.”¹⁵

The ten paths of utilizing the divine Name for attaining prophecy seem to be related to Dibbon – the name of a city – found at the beginning of the quotation above, and the revelation of the divine Name. “Dibbon” denotes a city, so is probably another reference to Patras; actually the sum of its letters in *gematria* equals 72,¹⁶ like the so-called divine name of 72 letters that Abulafia uses in some of his books as part of his technique. If my assumption concerning the esoteric content of the revelation in Patras is correct, namely that it would be disclosed later in Rome within the comprehensive and detailed structure of his seminal book *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* written in 1280, then it was in the Peloponnese that the seed was sown for the central work of this prophetic Kabbalist. It is interesting that it was in Patras that Abulafia experienced a recurrence of an earlier revelation, which took place in Barcelona almost a decade before and commanded him to journey to

¹² Abulafia 2001: 108. ¹³ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in Abulafia 2001: 98.

¹⁴ *Patros* = *Sefirot* = *shemot* = 746. The *Sefirot*, or “emanations” (singular *Sefirah*), are the archetypes and attributes through which God emerges from the depths of Himself into creation, i.e. the channels through which the divine is said to act, manifest itself, and structure the world of emanation. According to the *Sefer Yezirah*, the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism, God created the world by means of “thirty-two secret paths of wisdom.” These thirty-two paths correspond to ten Sefirot and the “twenty-two elemental letters” of the Hebrew alphabet, hence standing for the foundations of all creation. The ten Sefirot are often represented in the diagrammatic presentation of the Tree of Life, “which has a root, trunk, branches, leaves, bark, and pith, though none is distinct from another in essence and all form a single great unity” (Scholem 1974: 171) [Ed.].

¹⁵ This expression also appears further on in this quotation, its meaning being the technical use of the letters of the Names of God in order to achieve prophecy. In other works Abulafia uses this term, and similar terms like “the paths of Names,” to signify technical use of the Name. For additional examples, see Idel 2003.

¹⁶ *Gematria* (from Greek γεωμετρία) is one of the hermeneutical rules for interpreting the Torah. According to Scholem 1974: 337, *gematria* “consists of explaining a word or group of words according to the numerical value of the letters, or of substituting other letters of the alphabet for them in accordance with a set system” [Ed.].

Rome for an audience with the pope; this also contained the germination of the book he was to write while in Patras.

What did this prophetic Kabbalist do in Greece, during the years before he reached Patras? According to the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, it would seem that Abulafia sojourned in Patras for five years, probably soon after he left Spain in 1273. This we learn from Abulafia's own short autobiographical travelogue:

I have also taught it¹⁷ in many places: . . . In Thebes, there were ten [students] and not one of them succeeded, rather they lost both paths – the first as well as the second. Four in Euthrypo [Chalkis] and also [there] without any success, for opinions very much differ between people, all the more so [when concerning] the depths of wisdom and the secrets of the Torah. I did not discern in them anyone who was worthy to receive even the chapter headings of the truth [i.e. Kabbalah] as it is.¹⁸

Thus, Abulafia had fourteen students while in Greece, a rather considerable number, but all of them in his opinion were of poor quality. Accordingly, he claims explicitly that he did not give over to them by oral tradition the “chapter headings.” Ostensibly, this proves that even if he did teach Maimonides' *Guide* in Greece, he did not give over its secrets to his students, while he did in fact possess esoteric traditions during this period. After mentioning his students in Thebes, he states, “rather they lost both paths, the first as well as the second.” In Thebes then, Abulafia did teach his students two paths, even though these proved to be beyond their comprehension. It would seem that the second path refers to Abulafia's unique method of reading Maimonides' *Guide* according to his peculiar understanding, through the principles of the Linguistic-Ecstatic Kabbalah. This interpretative method, which concerned the secrets of the *Guide*, was recorded in three separate commentaries that Abulafia composed on this book, at least the first of which, *Sefer ha-G'eulah*, was written in 1273 – probably before his arrival in Greece.¹⁹ It was especially in Greece that Abulafia found fertile soil for his activities, though he claims that the reception was poor.

The question, then, arises: Did the fact that Abulafia spent at least six years in Greece have any specific impact on his Kabbalah? Can we detect any influences stemming in general from the surrounding Byzantine culture (even if the Byzantine cities of Thebes and Patras were, at that time, under Latin rule)? Secondly, can we entertain the possibility that Abulafia's Kabbalah was influenced by the specific brand of mysticism that was indigenous to Greece, namely the Greek Orthodox mystical

¹⁷ Namely the *Guide for the Perplexed*, which Abulafia interpreted in his kabbalistic manner.

¹⁸ Abulafia 2003: 368–369. ¹⁹ Wirszubski 1990: 34–48.

movement known as Hesychasm? The answer to the first question is emphatically positive. More than any other Kabbalist, maybe even more than all the Kabbalists together, Abulafia uses Greek words in his works.²⁰ On this subject, the Greek background to Abulafia's writing is exceedingly clear. In regard to the second question, perhaps there are indeed resemblances to be found between certain aspects of Abulafia's Kabbalah, and Hesychast mysticism in the writings of one of his students.²¹

The question of how deeply Abulafia's Kabbalah influenced the development of the Kabbalah in general and in Byzantium in particular, remains a desideratum for research. In order to measure his impact on one geographical area or another, one would first have to identify the Kabbalists who wrote works belonging to the Prophetic Kabbalah, for example *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, *Sefer 'Or ha-Menorah*, *Haqdamah*, *Sefer ha-Rehavah*, *The Anonymous Commentary on the Maimonidean Thirteen Principles of Faith*, and other extant works.²² We still do not know where these books were composed, except maybe at least in the last case, the *Anonymous Commentary*, whose provenance is arguably Greek, since it was copied verbatim into the *Sefer 'Even Sappir* by R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, and composed in Constantinople.²³ In any event, it is evident that a sizeable portion of Abulafia's *œuvre* was preserved in Byzantine-Jewish manuscripts, if we can judge by their provenance, and this would support the claim that Ecstatic Kabbalah continued to interest people in the Byzantine empire long after Abulafia's departure.

The greatest impact of Abulafia's Kabbalah is exemplified by the content of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*. Its anonymous Kabbalist author copied almost verbatim the whole of Abulafia's treatise *Gan Na'ul*, and also included several quotes from his *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*.²⁴ The former treatise was written for an anonymous Kabbalist or student with whom Abulafia corresponded. Since this book exists in relatively few manuscripts, it would seem that the author of the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* perhaps used a copy belonging to a relative or a follower of Abulafia's correspondence. However, going beyond the mere fact of the direct copying of Abulafia's works by the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, this book also contains many discussions written in the vein of the Prophetic Kabbalah, and even when we cannot find direct references to this literature, there is extensive use of *gematria*, letter-combinations, and other concepts that are congruent with Abulafia's Kabbalah.²⁵

²⁰ Idel 1998: 302. ²¹ Idel 1988c (foreword), also 14, 24, 35, 40, 52n, 80, 121, 177n.

²² Idel 1976: 69–75, 78–80.

²³ The *Anonymous Commentary* is extant in several manuscripts, e.g. Oxford-Bodleiana 2360, and quoted in *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, ms. Paris BNF 728, fol. 154b.

²⁴ Jellinek 1967: xliv; also Idel 1976: 11; Kushnir-Oron 1980: 75–80.

²⁵ See, for instance, fols. 70a–b, 71a–b, and others.

In addition to direct traces of Abulafia's Kabbalah, the influence of post-Abulafian Prophetic Kabbalah is recognizable in Byzantium. This is already evident in the book *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, which quotes a portion of *Liqqutei ha-Ran*, whose author may be identified, in my opinion, with R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, one of Abulafia's students and most possibly the teacher of another important Kabbalist, R. Isaac of Acre.²⁶ The book *Sefer Shushan Sodot* explicitly displays the impact of R. Isaac of Acre's Ecstatic Kabbalah, and it also reveals the influence of R. Nathan mentioned above. Traces of the writings of these Kabbalists are not recognizable in the literature produced in other centers, including Spain.

THE SEFER HA-TEMUNAH AND ITS LITERARY CIRCLE

An understanding of the development of the Kabbalah in the Byzantine empire exclusively in terms of the dissemination of the Prophetic-Ecstatic Kabbalah would yield only a partial picture. Another stream of the Kabbalah, also of Spanish provenance, flourished in an exceptional manner in Byzantium. This is completely different from the Prophetic Kabbalah, since the latter adopted as central teachings the transmigration of souls, or *gilgul*,²⁷ and the doctrine of cosmic cycles, or *shemittot*,²⁸ which were of no importance to Abraham Abulafia. The most well known representative of this second stream of kabbalistic literature is the *Sefer ha-Temunah* (*The Book of the Figure*), which deals with the symbolic valences of the shape of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.²⁹ An important unresolved question concerning the development of the Kabbalah in general concerns the place and date of composition of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The assumption that it was composed in Gerona, Catalonia, some time during the middle of the thirteenth century, as Gershom Scholem maintained for most of his life and consequently charted the historical development of the Kabbalah on this basis, lacks hard evidence.

Sefer ha-Temunah was never mentioned by any of the Kabbalists active on the Iberian peninsula before the expulsion from Spain. In light of this fact, it is singularly important to note that the first two writers to quote the *Sefer ha-Temunah* hailed from Byzantium: the author of the *Sefer ha-Peliy 'ah* and the author of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* spuriously

²⁶ Idel 2001.

²⁷ *Gilgul* is the Hebrew term for "transmigration of souls," "reincarnation," or "metempsychosis."

²⁸ *Shemittot* is the kabbalistic doctrine of cosmic cycles articulated in the *Sefer ha-Temunah* (c. 1250), which assumes a fixed periodicity in creation. According to Scholem (1974: 120), "the main point of this doctrine is that it is the Sefirot and not the stars that determine the progress and span of the world," by allotting particular creation-cycles to the world, culminating in a cosmic Sabbath of eschatological and redemptive significance [Ed.].

²⁹ For other compositions related to the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, see Scholem 1951: 64–70; for the book itself, see Gottlieb 1976: 570–571.

attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla. Both of these treatises were copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya, probably in the Negroponte (Euboea), as E. Gottlieb has already suggested.³⁰ On the other hand, I have argued for strong ties between R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi (and his circle) and the *Sefer ha-Temunah*.³¹ This Ashkenazi Kabbalist, the details of whose life are not well known, exerted a strong influence on this book and its adjoining commentary, as well as on the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.

Taken together, the absence of any reference to the *Sefer ha-Temunah* in Spain and its first appearance in Byzantine kabbalistic literature allow for only a tentative assessment of its place and date of composition – some time around the middle of the fourteenth century, or between 1335 and 1345, in Byzantium. The fact that this book was to become a classic of kabbalistic literature was due to developments within kabbalistic thought that occurred only after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Prior to this period, not a trace of this book can be detected in any Spanish kabbalistic writings.³²

Everything that we have said concerning the *Sefer ha-Temunah* mostly holds true also for its commentaries, which in turn influenced the author of the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* and others belonging to this literary circle.³³ In fact, we can perceive a distinct continuity of ideas stemming from R. Joseph Ashkenazi, passing on to the *Sefer ha-Temunah* and then in turn to its commentary, all the way through to the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*. This succession bears testimony to the singular development of one branch of R. Joseph Ashkenazi's Kabbalah, the one that did not opt to include within it the Zoharic type of Kabbalah, as did the other branch, represented by R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. Efraim Gottlieb was the first to notice that the doctrine of *shemittot*, particular to the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, as well as a reference to it by name, appears in two other works copied in Byzantium: *The Commentary on the Song of Songs* spuriously attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla and a treatise on kabbalistic *Sodot*, both of which were copied or even perhaps composed by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya.³⁴ I am of the opinion that these two works belong to the aforementioned first Byzantine branch of R. Joseph Ashkenazi's type of Kabbalah. In the absence of direct evidence, all subsequent research has relied on Scholem's hypothesis that the *Sefer ha-Temunah* influenced the writings of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. Indeed, as the tradition adduced by

³⁰ Gottlieb 1976: 117–121; also Hacker 1974: 133–137.

³¹ E.g. Idel 1990: 18–21; 1982: 26, and notes there; Pedaya 2003: 110–113, 212, 228 n. 1.

³² I would add that the collection of compositions that were copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya (or, according to another conjecture, were perhaps even composed by him) are of the utmost importance and must be understood as a first-rate indication of the intellectual climate that prevailed during the generation of *Sefer ha-Qanah* and *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.

³³ Kushnir-Oron 1980: 83. ³⁴ Gottlieb 1976: 117–121.

R. Moshe Cordovero attests, there is certainly an affinity between the doctrine of cosmic cycles, or *shemittot*, that is characteristic of R. David's writings, and the one also found in *Sefer ha-Temunah*. In his composition entitled *Shi'ur Qomah*, Cordovero wrote concerning *Sefer ha-Temunah*:

We do not know who the author of this book is, except that we received a tradition that these are the words of R. Isaac the author of the '*Or Zaru'a* and the author of the *Mar'ot ha-Tzove'ot*, *Sefer ha-Gadol*, and the *Sodei Razaiyya*'. Since I have listed for you his [other] books go and investigate them, find out for yourself if you can trust his novellae, since he is considered a contemporary scholar.³⁵

We can, then, postulate the opposite type of development, namely that the writings of these Kabbalists influenced the unknown author of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*.

In a few manuscripts the *Sefer ha-Temunah* immediately follows the *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* composed by R. Joseph Ashkenazi. Statistically speaking this is not very significant, since these are both ubiquitous compositions, for the most part found separately in many manuscripts. There are some manuscripts of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, however, which have a feature almost exclusive to the kabbalistic works of R. David and R. Joseph: above certain words abbreviated notations appear that are references to the names of specific *Sefirot*.³⁶ This phenomenon explicitly shows the affinity between the *Sefer ha-Temunah* and the works of these two Kabbalists. This same manner of notation is also found in a few manuscripts of the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, to be discussed below, and these manuscript witnesses were found bound with material belonging to R. Joseph Ashkenazi and the *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Pertinent to our discussion is the fact that the tendency to combine astrological elements within the theosophical system of the *Sefirot*, so pronounced in the works of R. Joseph Ashkenazi, also appears in the *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Noteworthy also is the appearance of Greek words in the anonymous commentary on *Sefer ha-Temunah*, a fact that may denote a Byzantine background of some sort.³⁷

Sefer ha-Temunah or, as it is sometimes called, *Sefer ha-Temunot* is the most important composition of its kind, belonging to a wide spectrum of kabbalistic works that share its world-view. A small number of these works were printed as addendums to the book itself, although there are many more extant compositions that display a similar outlook. The most important is its anonymous *Commentary* printed alongside *Sefer ha-Temunah*. *The Secret of the Tree of Emanation* by R. Isaac,³⁸ as well as the *Commentary on the Pesah Haggadah*, spuriously attributed to R. Moshe de Leon,³⁹ both

³⁵ Moshe Cordovero, *Shi'ur Qomah* (Warsaw 1883), fol. 80a.

³⁶ For this phenomenon, see Idel 1980: 63–66, 72–73; 1988b: 17–27.

³⁷ See *Sefer ha-Temunah*, fol. 58b: "aliqodosis" meaning the wheels of a water mill.

³⁸ Scholem 1951: 71–102. ³⁹ The published version is in Kasher 1967: 121–132.

belong to the literary output of the circle of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Three versions of a kabbalistic *Commentary on the Divine Name of Seventy Two Letters*, which were to be published in the famous book of magic known as *Sefer Raziel ha-Mal'akh*, are also quite similar in structure to the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, and they belong conceptually to this circle.⁴⁰

R. ISAIAH BEN JOSEPH HA-LEVI THE GREEK

The compositions of R. Isaiah ben Joseph the Greek – also sometimes called R. Isaiah “from Thebes” – mostly exist in manuscript form and are still awaiting thorough analysis.⁴¹ His works were composed toward the end of the first third of the fourteenth century (1325–1335?), and are apparently not all extant since he himself mentions works of a seemingly kabbalistic nature that we do not possess, such as the *Sefer Hashkafat ha-Sekhel*. Some of his oeuvre was printed by S. M. Mussaioff, including *Sod 'Etz ha-Da'at*, *Sefer 'Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, *Sefer ha-Kavod*, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, and *Sefer Gan 'Eden*.⁴² R. Isaiah displays a philosophical understanding of the *Heikhalot* literature as well as the Kabbalah, with a clear Neoplatonic streak, influenced by Jewish as well as Arabic sources.

R. Isaiah does not demonstrate a classical theosophical conception of the *Sefirot*. He consistently identifies the *Sefirot* with the Separate Intellects – whom he also calls Angels⁴³ – and so *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah* is viewed by him as an allegory alluding to the three worlds, upper, middle, and lower, similar to the stand taken by R. Abraham ibn Ezra. It seems that his definition of the relationship between God (referred to as *Causa causarum* or *'Illat ha-'Illot*) and the world, just as also the relationship of the “divine portion” – or the soul – to the body, is reminiscent of the outlook of the *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.⁴⁴ By interpreting the divine limbs of the *Shi'ur Qomah* as allusions to spiritual powers, R. Isaiah effectively neutralizes the anthropomorphic significance of the numerical measures of the divine body, transforming the exact and monumental measurements that are given in the text into non-dimensional expressions. Ostensibly, we can here detect influences that originate in anti-anthropomorphic philosophical trends, as found in the interpretation of the *Shi'ur Qomah* text already offered by Abulafia. Other influences stemming from the Ecstatic Kabbalah are noticeable in the works of R. Isaiah: the function of music in the process for attaining prophecy,⁴⁵ his use of erotic imagery for describing ecstatic

⁴⁰ Ms. Amsterdam 1701, fols. 25a–32a. ⁴¹ For now, see Scholem 1930b: 41–43.

⁴² Published in Jerusalem, 1891. The quotations below are from his edition.

⁴³ See *Sefer Gan 'Eden*, fol. 31b; *Sefer 'Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, fol. 82a.

⁴⁴ R. Yehudah Halevi, the famous twelfth-century Jewish philosopher, is mentioned several times in R. Isaiah's writings.

⁴⁵ Idel 1988c: 58.

experiences,⁴⁶ and a spiritualistic understanding of the messianic phenomenon.⁴⁷

R. ELNATAN BEN MOSHE QALQISH AND HIS SEFER
'EVEN SAPPİR

The book entitled *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, written by R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, has come down to us in two different versions. One is a short version in which the Kabbalah plays only a tangential part,⁴⁸ while the longer and later version, composed in Constantinople in 1367–1368, is extant only in a few manuscripts now found in the National Library in Paris (Hebrew Mss. 727–728).⁴⁹ The latter is a voluminous work that contains many kabbalistic passages scattered throughout its hundreds of folios. The author lived in Constantinople, but previously studied in Spain and probably also in Italy. During the period he spent studying in Spain, he became acquainted with Theosophical Kabbalah,⁵⁰ and subsequently, either from writings that he acquired in Italy or Greece or maybe even from personal contacts during a sojourn in Greece, he also absorbed influences stemming from the Ecstatic-Prophetic Kabbalah of Abulafia and his students. The *Sefer 'Even Sappir* is an extensive and for the most part eclectic work, replete with discussions of Jewish law, philosophy, and Kabbalah. The author copied passages and even whole compositions, often without attributing his sources, sometimes preserving for us some hitherto unknown kabbalistic materials.

The greatest impact by far on the thought of R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish is to be found in the Kabbalah of Abulafia and his school. Although Abulafia's works are never quoted verbatim, nor is his name ever mentioned; *'Even Sappir* is replete with discussions that clearly bear the imprint of Ecstatic Kabbalah, and in my opinion reveals the process by which this type of Kabbalah was internalized and continued to inspire other works.⁵¹ The method of letter combination was held in high esteem by R. Elnatan, for it is viewed by him as the way to revelation, even the way for one to attain the level of prophecy. This clearly points to the influence of Abulafia's technique, as well as an appreciation of its ultimate mystical goals. As has been pointed out in an important recent study by D. Schwartz, it is possible to discern in it the echoes of the contemporary

⁴⁶ Idel 1988c: 213 n. 51 and 197. ⁴⁷ *Sefer ha-Kavod*, fol. 42b. ⁴⁸ Kupfer 1973: 137–138.

⁴⁹ The longer version of the *Sefer 'Even Sappir* was finished in 1368 in Constantinople. On this composition, see Kupfer 1973; Schwartz 2004: 142–174.

⁵⁰ Theosophical Kabbalah, commonly associated with the circle of Isaac Luria (1534–1572) and the interpretation of the *Zohar*, seeks to describe and explicate the structure of the divine realm. Its preoccupation with theology and explication did not exclude the aspiration of an experiential apprehension of divinity. In Lurianic Kabbalah, abstract theosophy often transformed into a mystical way of life, thus acquiring an existential dimension. See here Idel 1995: 52 [Ed.].

⁵¹ Ms. Paris BNF 727, fol. 10a.

famous dispute over Hesychast mysticism.⁵² It is noteworthy that a connection between the longer version of *Sefer 'Even Sappir* and one of the compositions of the aforementioned R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi the Greek is plausible.

SEFER HA-PELIY'AH AND SEFER HA-QANAH

In recent studies, scholars have argued for the Byzantine provenance of two important and influential kabbalistic works, the *ha-Peliy'ah* and the *ha-Qanah*. Aharon Jellinek was the first to advance, although briefly,⁵³ a plausible argument concerning the origins of these two works, namely that they were composed not in Spain as was supposed, but rather in Byzantium.⁵⁴ The *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* is a wide-ranging commentary on the first few chapters of the book of Genesis, while the *Sefer ha-Qanah* is an extensive exposition on the subject of the "Rationales for the Commandments" according to the Kabbalah. Both books were composed at the beginning of the fifteenth century by the same, still anonymous author, who lived in an area suffused with Jewish Byzantine culture. This Kabbalist followed the eclectic style of the Byzantine Kabbalist R. 'Elnatan ben Moshe, collecting copious amounts of kabbalistic materials, slightly paraphrasing them, and then incorporating them into his own works. The sheer abundance of kabbalistic materials that the author copied, along with the fact that they originated from diverse schools of kabbalistic thought, testify to their wide dissemination during this period in Byzantium. The wide acceptance of these two books was due to their pseudo-epigraphic framework, having been set as a dialogue between different members of the family of R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah, and also due to the disclosure of revelations of Elijah that appear in the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.

Another important kabbalistic trend, utterly distinctive from the Ecstatic Kabbalah, was to gain prominence in the Byzantine Kabbalah. This is the Theosophical Kabbalah from the school of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi. Traces of this type of kabbalistic thought were not yet apparent in the writings of R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi the Greek, nor in the *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, but its impact upon the books *ha-Qanah* and *ha-Peliy'ah* was established in scholarship.⁵⁵ The *Commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah* has been a classic of Kabbalah since its appearance in the late thirteenth century. To be sure, we are speaking not only of one

⁵² Schwartz 2014. ⁵³ Jellinek 1878: 129.

⁵⁴ Kushnir-Oron 1980: 1–14; Ta-Shma 1990: 56–63, reprinted in Ta-Shma 2005: 218–228. See also Oron 1995: 297–298, who rejects the suggestion of Bauman 1995: 150–152, that the author was R. Shem Tov.

⁵⁵ Kushnir-Oron 1980: 82, 187–193.

composition, important though it may be, but rather of a multifarious and varied oeuvre penned by the aforementioned R. Joseph Ashkenazi, R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, and their students, and their students' subsequent followers.

It seems that it was in Byzantium that the author of the *Peliy'ah* and *Qanah* came into possession of a certain manuscript, of which some copies exist today, bound together: the *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The latter is found in several Byzantine-Jewish manuscripts together with the *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* by R. Joseph. These two works are among the main sources of the vast collage that constitutes *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.⁵⁶ They share a unique formulation of the theory of the cosmic cycles, more extreme than the one promulgated by Nahmanides and his circle, and one that did not manage to have any significant impact in Spain. Emphasizing the centrality of the cosmic cycles in such an open manner is characteristic of the school of R. Joseph, the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, the texts copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya who was active in Byzantium at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the books of *ha-Qanah* and *ha-Peliy'ah*, and later on, in an even more extreme manner, the *Sefer Shushan Sodot*. We cannot dwell here on the details of this unique theory of the cosmic cycles, which became a cornerstone of Byzantine Kabbalah. This theory, which holds that the world is now in the cosmic cycle dominated by the sefirah of *din*, or stern Justice, embraces a very pessimistic vision of present reality, which has its roots in Spanish Kabbalah but was ultimately rejected by it, and found its deepest expression in the school of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*.

In his *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, R. Moshe of Kiev, a Kabbalist who visited Byzantium coming from Russia, provides us with a singular development of the theory of the cosmic cycles, and preserves, in this anthology of kabbalistic literature, remnants of what is, in my opinion, a Byzantine composition that distinguishes itself by addressing the object of religious devotion as "Lord of the Cosmic Cycles."⁵⁷ This lost work clearly demonstrates a more extreme position on the issue of cosmic cycles than does either the *Sefer ha-Temunah* or the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, and an elaborated analysis remains a desideratum for scholarly research.

An important testimony attesting to the richness of kabbalistic trends in the provinces of the former Byzantine empire are reflected in just a few lines of the *Sefer Shushan Sodot*. R. Moshe of Kiev states that he has recently uncovered kabbalistic traditions, which he quotes under their authors' names, and his formulation of these traditions, as they appear in this passage, remains unparalleled in all of kabbalistic literature:

⁵⁶ See e.g. ms. Cambridge, Or. 2116, 8/1; ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1953.

⁵⁷ See e.g. R. Moshe of Kiev, *Sefer Shushan Sodot* (Korets 1784), fols. 13b, 14a.

[A] We have already explained this secret according to our own view, but since then I found a passage from our ancient sages on the same subject, and my heart was filled with the desire [to write it down] because it clarifies what I already wrote. These are the words that were related therein. [B] The learned and enlightened scholar, the honorable Rabbi Nathan said to me these words: “Know that the fullness of the secret of prophecy [is fulfilled] when the prophet will suddenly see his own form standing before him, and he will forget and ignore himself while he sees his own form [standing] before him speaking with him and telling him the future.” Pertaining to this secret, our Sages of blessed memory said: “Great is the power of those prophets who can liken the [created] form to its Creator.”⁵⁸ The learned scholar Ibn Ezra said, “the one who hears is a man and the one who speaks is a man”⁵⁹ [the text] ends here. [C] Another scholar wrote as a variation on this theme and these are his words: “And I, through the power of letter combination and mental concentration, experienced what happened to me with the light that I saw going with me, as I have mentioned in my book *Sha’arei Tzedeq*. Although I did not merit to see my own form standing in front of me, for this I could not achieve.” These are his words. [D] Another learned scholar wrote [to this effect] as a variation on this theme and these are his words: “And I, just but a youth, know and recognize with definitive knowledge that ‘I am no prophet neither am I the son of a prophet,’⁶⁰ nor does the Holy Spirit [*Ruah ha-Qodesh*] reside in me, nor can I make use of a Heavenly Voice [*Bat Qol*], for I have not merited this, ‘I have not put off my coat . . . I have not washed my feet.’⁶¹ Nevertheless, I call on the Heavens and the Earth to be my witnesses, as well as those who dwell in the Heavens above – they too can testify, that one day I was sitting and writing a secret [matter explained] by the ‘way of truth’ [a kabbalistic secret] and suddenly I saw my own form standing in front of me, and my own self disappeared from me, and I was forced and compelled to cease writing.”⁶²

It has already been pointed out by G. Scholem and E. Gottlieb that section [C] deals with the author of the book *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, a work stemming from the school of Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abulafia, and section [D] with R. Isaac of Acre.⁶³ Section [B] refers to a R. Nathan who is reported to have given over a tradition (“he said to me”) to an unknown student, and in my opinion it also refers to the author of *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Har’ar.⁶⁴ While it is true that section [C] begins with the words “another scholar wrote,” which could be explained as now referring to a different personality, we could also translate the same words from the Hebrew as “the same scholar wrote afterwards.” It is reasonable to assume that sections [B] and [C] found in this manuscript being read by R. Moshe of Kiev were collected by R. Isaac of Acre, who was the person

⁵⁸ *Genesis Rabba* 24:1; 27:1.

⁵⁹ Abraham Ibn Ezra: “For the one who speaks is a man and the one who hears is a man,” *Yesod Mora* (Frankfurt 1840), 50; also see Ibn Ezra’s *Commentary on Daniel* 10:21.

⁶⁰ Amos 7:14.

⁶¹ Paraphrasing Song of Songs 5:3. ⁶² *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, fol. 69b.

⁶³ Scholem 1930a; 1991: 253–254; Gottlieb 1976: 247; Idel 1988a: 86–95; 2001: 52–62.

⁶⁴ Idel 2001; 2002.

responsible for preserving other kabbalistic passages penned by the same R. Nathan.⁶⁵ We should mention here that *Sefer Shushan Sodot* contains other passages that were, in my opinion, penned by R. Isaac of Acre, but since they are anonymously copied by R. Moshe of Kiev, scholars could not identify their true author.⁶⁶

It must be stressed that the material brought together in this passage is not extant in any other source, which supports the thesis that we can find important discussions for the study of Jewish mysticism in the Byzantine Kabbalah, texts that otherwise did not survive in any other of the centers of kabbalistic activity.

Clearly, at least one Kabbalist, R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, who was familiar with kabbalistic materials stemming from the circle of R. Abraham Abulafia, also studied in Spain and quotes from the school of Castilian Kabbalah as well – most notably from the Kabbalists R. Moshe de Leon and R. Joseph Gikatilla. On the other hand, R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya traveled from Spain through Byzantium on his way to the Land of Israel and probably brought with him Spanish kabbalistic texts to Byzantium. It would seem that R. Joseph Ashkenazi's Kabbalah was also brought to Byzantium from Spain. Of course, we must remember that the Byzantine Kabbalah absorbed in a significant manner the Kabbalah that developed in different parts of Italy, especially that of R. Menahem Recanati, while appropriating elements from the Kabbalah of R. Reuven Tzarfati, who flourished in Italy.

KABBALAH IN CANDIA

An important center of kabbalistic study was Candia. In one of his epistles, R. Abraham Abulafia states that he sent compositions (*quntresim*) on the subject of Prophetic Kabbalah to the island of Crete.⁶⁷ R. Shemaryah ben Elijah Ikriti [of Crete] was acquainted with kabbalistic ideas, even though his thought is not considered to be kabbalistic.⁶⁸ R. Elnatan lived for a time on this island prior to his writing '*Even Sappir*, as stated in ms. Paris BNF 727, fol. 26b. Indirect yet important evidence about Kabbalah in Candia may be gathered from R. Elijah ben Eliezer's *Commentary on the Sefer ha-Bahir*.⁶⁹ R. Elijah, a philosopher who composed his commentary in

⁶⁵ Idel 1988a: 73–89.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, fols. 70a–b, 71a–b. Additional kabbalistic material found in a manuscript in Jerusalem probably preserves early Abulafian material mixed with early texts of R. Isaac of Acre, an issue to which I shall devote a separate study.

⁶⁷ Ms. Sasson 56, fol. 33b. ⁶⁸ Sirat 1981: 199–227.

⁶⁹ The Bahir ("Book of Brightness") is among the earliest and most influential kabbalistic texts, its title deriving from Job 37:21, which is quoted in the opening of the text: "And now they do not see the light, it is Brilliant (*Bahir*) in the skies." It is associated with the twelfth-century Provence circle of Kabbalists, though it has been argued that it incorporates much earlier material [Ed.].

the second half of the fourteenth century, opposed the Kabbalah and interpreted the early Kabbalistic treatise *Sefer ha-Bahir* in a way that completely removed its characteristic theosophical conceptions.⁷⁰ At the end of the fourteenth century, the oldest extant manuscript of the *Zohar* was copied in Candia, and a composition written by R. Joseph Gikatilla was copied there in 1407. In 1418, R. Nehemiah ben Menahem Qalomiti completed his book *Milhemet ha-'Emmet* (*Battle for Truth*),⁷¹ in which he clearly shows his acquaintance with the *Zohar* as well as the *Sefer ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* of R. Moshe de Leon.

The anti-kabbalistic polemic that developed in Byzantium is a separate topic in itself. Three exceptional documents pertaining to this controversy are still extant. One is the still unedited *Commentary on the Sefer ha-Bahir* by Elijah ben Eliezer from Candia, partially preserved in ms. Vatican 431, which attempts to portray the *Bahir* as a philosophical rather than kabbalistic work. R. Elijah distinguishes between two types of perceptions concerning the *Sefirot*: the right one, the one that is compatible with “rational thought” – the *Sefirot* seen as mediating among entities suspended between God and the world – and the wrong one, that views the *Sefirot* as actually being Divine *Middot* (measures or attributes), in kabbalistic parlance – the essence of God.⁷²

The second instance of anti-kabbalistic polemic comprises the attack of R. Moshe ha-Cohen Ashkenazi on the kabbalistic doctrine of *gilgul*, the transmigration of souls or metempsychosis, better known as the “Debate in Candia,” which was described by E. Gottlieb. The documents pertaining to this debate show fierce opposition to the Kabbalah. Aspects of this debate probably influenced the detailed criticism leveled against the Kabbalah in the book entitled *Behinat ha-Dat* written by R. Elijah Delmedigo, which was also composed in Candia.

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the specific character of the Byzantine Kabbalah, especially its preoccupation with the idea of metempsychosis that is so central to it since the fourteenth century, really instigated the critique in Candia. The third document is the anonymous *Epistle on the Gilgul*, which mainly discusses religious issues as seen from a philosophical perspective, one that tends toward the doctrines of Averroes.⁷³

⁷⁰ See ms. Vatican 431, fols. 1a–26b. For R. Elijah and his writings, see Rosenberg 1978: 63–64; Kupfer 1973: 134–135.

⁷¹ Doron 1975. ‘Adoniyah Qalomiti had previously, in 1329, copied one of R. Abraham Abulafia’s commentaries on Maimonides’ *Guide* while in the city of Thessalonike, and it would seem that he was related to the author of *Milhemet ha-'Emmet*.

⁷² Ms. Vatican 431, fol. 5b. On the whole issue, see now Ogren 2009: 41–70, especially 44.

⁷³ Gottlieb 1976: 370–396; Ravitsky 1991: 182–211; Ogren 2009; Scholem 2004: 210–213.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BYZANTINE KABBALAH

In light of the textual evidence presented above, we may conclude that a long line of compositions, considered by the last generation of scholars to be of Spanish provenance, were actually composed in Byzantium. Thus the balance between the contributions of these two places concerning the production of kabbalistic literature, in terms of both quality and quantity, must be significantly adjusted. Moreover, a long series of kabbalistic manuscripts that are kept in various libraries were copied in Byzantium, a fact that testifies to the interest for Kabbalah in Byzantium. If we compare the creative output of kabbalistic literature there during the years 1330–1492 to that of Spain in the same period, we can formulate important conclusions concerning the history of the Kabbalah.

First, quantitatively speaking, Byzantine kabbalistic works did not fall short, in either scope or impact, to those composed in the Iberian peninsula during this period.

Second, in terms of ideas, we are speaking of Byzantium as a center of kabbalistic study possessing its own distinct character: its Kabbalah retained a blend of Prophetic Kabbalah and Theosophical Kabbalah, originating from the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi. We are not speaking only of a new synthesis of different strands of kabbalistic materials; rather, Byzantine Kabbalah was reconceptualized owing to encounters between kabbalistic trends that remained separate from the general consensus of Spanish Kabbalah, or types of Spanish Kabbalah that were not accepted in Spain, and the Prophetic Kabbalah.

Third, during this period, the Spanish Kabbalists did not produce even one classic of Kabbalah. In contrast, the anonymous books *Sefer ha-Temunah*, *Sefer Qanah*, and *Peliy'ah*, and R. Moshe of Kiev's *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, as well as other works belonging to those circles, all became frequently quoted works from the fifteenth century onwards, until they were printed by the Hasidic printers during the eighteenth century.

Fourth, Byzantine circles were indubitably very important for the general development of the Kabbalah. Without a proper understanding of the processes that enabled the appearance of this center, or the ideas that are indigenous to it, we would find it most difficult to gain a proper understanding of the kabbalistic phenomena enumerated here.

The specifically eclectic character of Byzantine Kabbalah during the fifteenth century was dependent upon the encounter between Spanish, basically Theosophical Kabbalah, and local Kabbalah. Byzantine originality expressed itself in its willingness to interweave different strands of kabbalistic thought, and this synthesis is exemplified by the majority of the kabbalistic works that beyond doubt were composed in Byzantium. Although Byzantine Kabbalah can be characterized as a synthesis of two

kabbalistic trends that were not accepted in Spain, this does not mean that it rejected the Spanish or Provençal Kabbalah. The writings of R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi, *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, and certainly *Sefer ha-Qanah* and *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* as well as *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, are replete with copied passages – at times bordering on plagiarism – that stemmed from the theosophical-theurgical school of Spanish Kabbalah. There was no ban on Spanish Kabbalah but rather a preference for absorbing kabbalistic systems of thought that were not integrated within its main stream. In Byzantium, perhaps due to the absence there of authoritative rabbinic personalities, these trends flourished in an atmosphere which could, undisturbed, foster even more daring notions. It is in my opinion no accident that the antinomian seventeenth-century figure known as the Messiah Sabbatai Tzevi was a Byzantine Kabbalist, to judge by the kabbalistic texts he studied.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Idel 2011b: 45–83. On Sabbatai, see now Koutzakiotis 2014.

CHAPTER 32

AQUINAS IN BYZANTIUM

MARCUS PLESTED

The Dominican theologian and “Angelic Doctor” of the Roman Catholic Church, St. Thomas Aquinas (1243/4–1274), enjoyed a remarkable reputation in the Palaiologan era, finding admirers and detractors across the Byzantine theological and political spectrum. Indeed, Aquinas came to enjoy normative status as the preeminent representative of Latin theology at a time when his authority in the Catholic west was far from assured. Engagement with Aquinas is in fact so pervasive in late Byzantium that a study of his reception reveals much about the intellectual life of the period in the realms of both theology and philosophy.¹

DOMINICAN ACTIVITY

Aquinas first began to percolate into the Byzantine thought-world through the Dominican presence in Constantinople in the period of Latin occupation following the capture of the city by the Fourth Crusade in 1204.² By 1233, the Dominicans had established a house in the city and begun to persuade the Greeks to see the “error” of their ways: see, for example, the *Tractatus contra Graecos* of 1252.³ This foundation does not appear to have survived the Byzantine reconquest of the city in 1261, but the Dominican presence was reestablished in 1299 by William Bernard de Gaillac. This establishment remained open until 1307 when it was closed at the instigation of the fiercely anti-Latin patriarch Athanasios. The friars then removed across the Golden Horn to Genoese-controlled Pera. By this time, Aquinas had become an indispensable part of the Dominican polemic against the Greeks. The aforementioned *Tractatus*, for example, was reworked by Bartholomew of Constantinople in 1305 so as to incorporate arguments from Thomas’ *Summa theologiae*.⁴ De Gaillac is also the

¹ General studies: Bouvy 1910; Jugie 1928; Beck 1935; Buda 1956; Papadopoulos 1967; 1982; Tyn 1964; Karpozilos 1970; Moutsopoulos 1975; Barbour 1993; Benakis 2002a; Podskalsky 1977: 180–230. This chapter is essentially a précis of Plested 2012.

² Loenertz 1933; Congourdeau 1987a; Delacroix-Besnier 1997. ³ Dondaine 1951.

⁴ *Ibid.* 326–327.

first figure recorded (by Bernard Gui) as having translated elements of Thomas into Greek.⁵ These translations are not extant.

Several other Constantinopolitan Dominicans engaged in theological battles with the Greeks, including Simon of Constantinople and Philip de Bindo Incontri, both authors of treatises on the procession of the Holy Spirit.⁶ This initial intrusion of Aquinas into the Byzantine sphere began to generate some reaction in Byzantine circles. Around the beginning of the fourteenth century, an anti-Latin treatise by Manuel Moschopoulos (a pupil of Maximos Planoudes) rebuts Aquinas indirectly in its attack on Simon of Constantinople's arguments regarding the *filioque*.⁷

The discussions initiated in 1334 by the arrival in Constantinople of two Dominican papal representatives, Richard of England and Francesco da Camerino, brought Aquinas once again to the centre of Greek–Latin polemic. The principal theological spokesperson of the Orthodox party, Barlaam the Calabrian, reacted fiercely to the teachings of Aquinas that were brought to bear by his Latin interlocutors, lambasting him as a proponent of a form of theology that is barely scriptural, foreign to patristic tradition, and inadmissibly syllogistic. He even goes so far as to characterize Aquinas' work as demonically inspired.⁸

DEMETRIOS KYDONES

The real explosion of Byzantine interest in Aquinas dates to 1354 and the completion of a translation of the *Summa contra gentiles* (as *Κατὰ Ἑλλήνων / Kata Hellenon*) by the Byzantine statesman Demetrios Kydones. Demetrios served as chief minister (*μεσάζων / mesazon*) to three emperors: John VI Kantakuzenos, John V Palaiologos, and Manuel II Palaiologos, a remarkable career. His consistent policy in office was to minimize accommodation with the Ottoman Turks and instead to seek help and support from the Latin west to shore up the empire. The loss of Gallipoli in 1354 marked the nadir of his political career, expelling him temporarily from politics and into the monastery where he completed his first major work of translation. Demetrios' interest in Aquinas came as a direct consequence of his political and diplomatic activities. In his long *Apology*, he tells us that he had become dissatisfied with the mediocre interpreters available to him and so he took it upon himself to learn Latin. He engaged the services of a Dominican from Pera, very likely Philip de Bindo Incontri. His tutor cannily proposed the *Summa contra gentiles* as a base text for instruction and Demetrios was hooked, immediately setting

⁵ Bouvy 1910. ⁶ Congourdeau 1987b; Dondaine 1951: 405–406; Loenertz 1948. ⁷ Polemis 1996.

⁸ Barlaam, *Opere contro i Latini*. See Sinkewicz 1982.

himself the task of translating Aquinas into Greek. This task, Demetrios tells us, had the full approval and support of his sometime imperial master John VI, who predicted that the translations would greatly benefit the Greeks, and had copies made at his own expense.⁹ This imperial support, coupled with the great interest the translations excited, helps explain the relative profusion of extant manuscripts.

Demetrios was also to translate much of the *Summa theologiae*. The *Prima pars* translation appears to have been in an advanced form by at least 1363, but dating of the remainder of the translation remains uncertain.¹⁰ He also translated the *Ad cantorem Antiochenum* and *De articulis fidei et ecclesiae sacramentis ad archiepiscopum Panormitanum*, together with various works of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Ricoldo da Monte Croce.¹¹ The great virtue of Latin writers, for Demetrios, is the enticing exactness of their arguments and their expert use of classical philosophy: “these are men who have by great labour plunged into the intricacies of Plato and Aristotle, which our own men had never yet wrestled with.”¹² Demetrios is in no doubt of the superiority of Christian over Hellenic wisdom. In *Letter* 33, he avers that had Aquinas debated with Aristotle and Plato he would surely have persuaded them to close the Academy and join the Church.¹³ Demetrios’ translations themselves are done with a good deal of skill and care, including frequent reworking of Thomas’ citations of Aristotle against the original Greek.¹⁴

In *Letter* 333 to Maximos Chrysoberges, Demetrios expands on his reasons for admiring Thomas: “the treasury of divine ideas in this man is really great, and you would not find any difficult question in the dogmas of the faith which he, in his treatises, does not either investigate in itself or demonstrate in his other questions and answers.” Demetrios singles out Thomas’ theological method as his most characteristic feature:

He presents the arguments opposed to the question as if they were spoken by opponents. After resolving these arguments in no ordinary way, but so that they have no effectiveness left, he then binds fast the object of enquiry with proofs from all sides, using evidence from scripture, which takes precedence in all his works, and also using proofs from reasoning and from philosophy, in order that we might thus abound in strong proofs of the faith.¹⁵

⁹ *Apology* 1:363.22–23, 364.48–52.

¹⁰ Only the *Secunda secundae* 1–79 has yet been edited: Leontsinis et al. 1976–2002. See further Tinnefeld 1981: 71.

¹¹ For a complete list of his translations, see Tinnefeld 1981: 68–72.

¹² *Apology* 1:366.88–89, 95–96. ¹³ Ed. Loenertz, v. 1, 66.

¹⁴ Rackl 1923–1924; Moutsopoulos 1975; Demetracopoulos 1982; Glycofrydi-Leontsinis 2003.

¹⁵ Ed. Loenertz, v. 2, 266–268 (tr. Kianka 1982).

In his *Defence of Thomas Aquinas against Neilos Kabasilas*, he pithily sums up the virtues of “the blessed Thomas” as “wisdom, exactitude, and holiness.”¹⁶

Aquinas represents for Kydones the undivided faith of the Church: founded upon the common Scriptures, proclaimed in the united witness of the patristic tradition, and expressed according to the best traditions of Greek philosophy. This sense of affinity is in large measure a sign of Aquinas’ searching knowledge of the Greek Fathers and Church Councils and indeed his own roots in Byzantine scholasticism – which term I use to describe the long tradition of disciplined argumentation and forensic appeal to scriptural and patristic authority that characterizes so much Orthodox theological endeavor from the era of the Christological controversies onwards.¹⁷ Aquinas’ mastery of Plato and Aristotle set the seal on what was really a kind of homecoming. Aquinas was, in effect, being welcomed as an honorary Byzantine.

Demetrios’ admiration for Thomas certainly contributed to his decision to be received into the Roman Catholic Church (most likely in 1357). Demetrios had also long harboured reservations concerning the theology of St. Gregory Palamas with its more than merely conceptual distinction between the divine essence and divine operation, or energy, but kept his own counsel as these teachings were formally adopted by the Church at a series of Constantinopolitan Councils in 1341, 1347, and 1351. But when a later council in 1368 condemned his own brother, Prochoros, for impugning the *cultus* and teaching of Palamas, he felt impelled to speak out publicly. In his one treatise on the subject, Demetrios attacked Palamas’ “new dogmas” as a grave assault on the divine simplicity. There are important elements of Thomas in Demetrios’ arguments – God’s nature as pure act, the identity of his essence and his existence, but, interestingly, no significant use of the distinctive methodology he had found so enthralling.

Demetrios was, of course, to be largely disappointed in his hopes that theological and political rapprochement with Rome would ensure the long-term survival of the empire. His critique of Palamas was similarly ineffectual. But while his diplomatic efforts and theological contributions were to achieve small success, his translations of Aquinas unleashed something of great power and incalculable impact onto the Byzantine world.

NEILOS KABASILAS (D. 1363)

Neilos Kabasilas was one of the principal admirers of Aquinas in the Kydones translation. A renowned theologian lauded and courted by

¹⁶ The *Defence* is currently being edited by Denis Searby; see further Rackl 1920; 1925; Podskalsky 1977: 196–204.

¹⁷ For Byzantine scholasticism, see Plested 2012: 10–28; Daley 1984.

Palamites and anti-Palamites alike and a layman for much of his life, Neilos became Palamas' successor as archbishop of Thessalonike in 1361.¹⁸ His main works are directed against the Latins, above all the massive treatise *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*.¹⁹ Aquinas is a direct target here as a primary defender of the *filioque*, but his general treatment is, amazingly, remarkably positive. Demetrios Kydones tells us that Neilos had initially welcomed Thomas with unreserved enthusiasm, even to the extent of being "madly in love with" his works (μνικὸς ἦν ἔραστὸς / *manikos en erastos*). Demetrios saw Neilos' anti-Latin works as something of a betrayal, but in fact Neilos may more accurately be regarded as having remained a cautious enthusiast for Thomas throughout his career. In the work on the procession of the Spirit, Thomas is certainly attacked, but in no straightforward or unthinking manner. Indeed, Thomas is most often referenced by Neilos to undermine the Latin positions or to demonstrate his own internal contradictions. He becomes, as it were, a kind of fifth column within the Latin camp. This is far more a strategy of appropriation than mere refutation. Neilos cites the Kydones translations of the *Summa contra gentiles*, the *Summa theologiae*, and the *De potentia*. He also borrows something of Aquinas' theological methodology: clear *Fragestellung*; forensic use of Scripture, patristic authority, and reason; systematic presentation and rebuttal of contrary positions; and the furnishing of solutions to the various *aporiae*: in other words, classic Byzantine scholasticism. In his *Against the Conclusions of the Latins*, he begins by singling Thomas out as the Latins' "pre-eminent theologian" (1.7),²⁰ but one who underscores the commonality of Latins and Greeks in respect to such fundamental matters as the differentiation of names applied to God according to person and according to nature.²¹ Thomas is soon marshaled to bolster the Greek position once again, being taken to affirm that to emit or to be cause within the Trinity cannot pertain to essence but only to person (1.9). Only at the third mention is anything negative alleged, with Thomas deemed self-contradictory in upholding two who emit but not two emitters, because of the one procession (1.16).²² But before long, Aquinas is once again recruited to the Greek case on the basis of his assertion that the essence does not beget essence and that the divine nature of the Son is not begotten, either of itself or accidentally (1.42).²³ In the next section, Thomas is hailed as an "interpreter of the theologians," and commended for his exacting amplification and clarification of patristic testimony. Here, Thomas is again

¹⁸ Kislas 2001 is an excellent introduction to Neilos; also Schirò 1957.

¹⁹ The large work is divided into three parts: five discourses *Against the Conclusions of the Latins* (= Kislas 2001), a *Refutation of the Premises of the Latins*, and a *Refutation of the Syllogisms of the Latins* (= ed. Candal 1945: 188–385).

²⁰ The same judgment is repeated in *Against the Conclusions of the Latins* 5.20.

²¹ Cf. *ST I*^a q. 35 a.1–2; q. 38 a.1–2. ²² Cf. *ST I*^a q. 36 a.4 ad 7. ²³ Cf. *ST I*^a q. 39 a.5 s.c.; ad 2.

coopted to the Greek cause, in his demonstration that the Son is not begotten of the essence of the Father (I.43).²⁴ Thomas certainly comes in for some criticism in this work but the pattern remains one of cautious enthusiasm in the interests of appropriating Aquinas to the cause of Orthodoxy.

PROCHOROS KYDONES

A rather different approach was taken by Prochoros Kydones (c. 1335–c. 1369), the de facto leader of the anti-Palamite party following the death of Nikephoros Gregoras (d. c. 1360).²⁵ Prochoros drew on Thomas in an unremitting and futile struggle against Palamite theology that culminated with his condemnation at the Council of Constantinople of 1368. An Athonite *hieromonachos*, Prochoros translated portions of the *Summa theologiae* (focusing on the *Tertia pars* and the *Supplementum*), the *De potentia*, the *De mundi aeternitate*, and the prooimion (at least) to the *Sententia libri metaphysicae*.²⁶ Prochoros' opposition to Palamas certainly owed a great deal to his immersion in Aquinas. His principal work on the subject, *On Essence and Energy* (in six books) is decidedly Thomist, much of it (books 1–5) being composed of translated excerpts from the *Summa contra gentiles*, *Summa theologiae*, and *De potentia*. But book 6, while keeping closely to Thomas' methodology, appears to be largely an original composition. It is this book, *On the Light of Thabor*, that is the central target of the various refutations of Prochoros at and following the Council of 1368. Book 6 follows the method and structure of Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae* closely but actual connections with the content of Aquinas' teaching on the specific matter of the Transfiguration are few. Prochoros argues that the light of Thabor is to be understood simply as an analogy or allegory, a natural symbol or type of a divine mystery (6.15). That light is, crucially, created, representing by analogy the interior light of the soul (6.24). This account of the light of the Transfiguration has little in common with the considerably more robust doctrine of the outpouring of the light of God that we find in Thomas' treatment of the theme in *Summa theologiae* ST III^a q. 45. Hauled before the Council, Prochoros appears to have abandoned his contention that the light of the Transfiguration is simply created, adopting instead the hopeless position that it is both created and uncreated, since Christ is dual – both God and man. This wavering position has none of Thomas' unimpeachable Christological clarity and rigour. Prochoros is also said to have likened the light that shone from Christ with that which shone from Moses, holding that both were temporary phenomena and simply came and

²⁴ Cf. ST I^a q. 39 a. 5 ad 1. ²⁵ Tyn 1964; Russell 2006. ²⁶ Mercati 1931: 28–40.

went. Again, this is in direct contradiction to what we find in Aquinas' treatment of the topic. Had Prochoros stuck to Thomas, to the theology of passages he himself had translated, he would have been on considerably firmer ground at the trial. As it is, the weakest portions of Prochoros' disquisition on Thabor are very much his own work. The condemnation of 1368 can in no way be represented as anti-Latin, anti-scholastic, or anti-Thomas. Nor was any necessary opposition perceived between Thomism and Palamism. This was very much an intra-Byzantine affair, with Prochoros condemned not for his Thomist sympathies but for his own theological inadequacies.

JOHN VI KANTAKOUZENOS (C. 1295–1383)

The emperor John VI (reigned 1347–1354) was intimately involved in the emergence of Aquinas into the Byzantine world and he oversaw, as emperor, the definitive triumph of Palamite theology at the Constantinopolitan Council of 1351. Even after his abdication, when he became the monk Ioasaph, he remained an influential figure dedicating a great deal of energy to the defense of Palamite theology and in particular to the refutation of Prochoros. For all his respect for Demetrios Kydones, John could hardly be expected to refrain from taking a stance in the Prochoros affair. Prochoros had called into question the decisions of the Council of 1351 and attacked the veneration of St. Gregory Palamas, whom John had so publicly championed. John's refutations follow swiftly on the condemnation of 1368 and concentrate above all on book 6 of Prochoros' *On Essence and Energy* – precisely that portion of the work that can be distinguished as Prochoros' own. Having been closely connected with Demetrios Kydones' translation work, John was doubtless aware that books 1–5 largely consisted of selections from Thomas. In his *First Refutation*, John goes so far as to bring Aquinas to bear *against* Prochoros: "I bring before you the witness of Thomas, teacher among the Latins, who breathes syllogisms rather than air, and against whom it would not be right for you to object." Thomas is here cited with evident approval. John reproduces a long extract from the *Summa contra gentiles* 1.9, making use of the translation by Demetrios which he himself had sponsored (1.16). This passage discusses the twofold truth of divine things, distinguishing "one which reason is competent to investigate, the other which escapes all human intellectual prying." John continues the citation to embrace Thomas' assertion of the harmony between reason and faith, the primacy of scriptural revelation, and the overarching methodological considerations of the *Summa contra gentiles*. Prochoros is here squarely condemned for failing to heed his ostensible master on the strict limits of rational inquiry. This striking use of Aquinas against Prochoros only serves

to underline the fact that the Prochoros affair did not amount to a condemnation of western theology in general, nor of Thomas in particular. Nor is support of Palamas a bar to admiration for Aquinas. The bulk of the remainder of the *Refutation* is devoted to a systematic demolition of book 6 of Prochoros' *On Essence and Energy* while *Refutation 2* deals with further patristic extracts produced by Prochoros in support of his theses. Books 1–5 escape virtually without comment. In effect, Prochoros is reproached not so much for his Thomism but for being insufficiently attentive to his avowed master.

AQUINAS BETWEEN PALAMITES AND ANTI-PALAMITES

Prochoros was also subject to the attentions of Theophanes, metropolitan of Nicaea.²⁷ Theophanes makes extensive use of Aquinas in his discourses *On the Light of Thabor*, composed between 1368 and 1376. As with the critique by the monk-emperor, the attacks on Prochoros relate principally to his own conclusions and not to ideas derived from Thomas. Moreover, Theophanes draws directly on Thomas in his own defense of Palamite theology.²⁸ Theophanes puts forward an account of the threefold division of knowledge: from creation through the senses, from faith based on revelation, and from direct apprehension of God “as he is” (I John 3:2).²⁹ This triplex model is presented in very similar fashion to that given in *Summa contra gentiles* 4.1, including the citation from I John. Theophanes also suggests, on the basis of divine simplicity, the identity of God's essence with his intellect, intellectual activity (τὸ νοεῖν / *to noein*), and self-existence as wisdom.³⁰ Here again, an unmistakable connection with Aquinas may be detected, in particular *Summa contra gentiles* 3.53. This is a proposition that does not sit easily with the more usual Palamite position that such things (intellect, intellectual activity, and wisdom) are to be counted among the divine energies.

When we move to the closing years of the fourteenth century, we continue to see Thomas read and admired in many quarters of Byzantium, in both the unionist and the anti-unionist camps. Within the unionist circle patronized and inspired by Demetrios Kydones, the most theologically significant figure is Manuel Kalekas (d. 1410).³¹ Like his sometime patron, Manuel was a decided opponent of Palamite theology. In a work written before 1391, *On Faith*, he provides an elegant and systematic summary of the Christian faith in ten chapters, woven around patristic testimony. The treatise relies heavily on Thomas, in particular the

²⁷ *PLP* 7615. See also Polemis 1996, to which this section is much indebted.

²⁸ Polemis 1996: 92–109. ²⁹ *On the Light of Thabor* 2.840–926. ³⁰ *Ibid.* 2.1029–1041.

³¹ Biography: ed. Loenertz 1950: 16–46.

Summa contra gentiles and the *Ad cantorem Antiochenum*.³² The treatise moves from the one God to the three persons and then proceeds to the Incarnation, the sacraments, and the last things. Kalekas' treatment of the one God offers many parallels with book 1 of the *Summa contra gentiles*, from the argument for a first mover to the various affirmations made of God and the incommensurate nature of names applied to both God and creatures. Like Aquinas, Kalekas treats the Holy Trinity as a matter of revelation by contrast to the philosophically demonstrable existence of the one God.³³ He affirms the Father as the cause of Son and Spirit but centers his attention on the procession of the Spirit through the Son.³⁴ Large chunks of the chapter on the Trinity come straight from *Summa contra gentiles* 4. Kalekas skates over the essence–energies distinction, carefully ruling out the vision of the divine essence but eschewing all mention of uncreated energies distinct from that essence.³⁵ Kalekas' treatment of the seven sacraments is heavily dependent on *Summa contra gentiles* 4.56 and following chapters.³⁶ The treatise adopts the theory of transubstantiation: the underlying substance changes while the accidents of bread and wine remain.³⁷ Kalekas' treatment of the rational basis of the Incarnation draws deeply on Aquinas' *Ad cantorem Antiochenum*.³⁸ The treatise treads warily when it comes to the questions disputed between east and west and never mentions Thomas by name. Kalekas' treatise was designed to incorporate Aquinas' wisdom and rigor within a non-polemical presentation of the teachings of the universal Church. And to a great extent it succeeded: this decidedly Thomist work earned the enthusiastic approbation of the zealously anti-Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Dositheos, who published it without attribution in his *Tome of Love against the Latins*. Rarely, if ever, has a Byzantine Thomist found such explicit recognition as a pillar of Orthodoxy. Sadly, Kalekas found the Orthodox authorities of his own time less receptive. His close association with Demetrios Kydones and his connections with other anti-Palamites made him a marked man. During an anti-Palamite crackdown, he was pressed to affirm the Palamite Tome promulgated by the Council of 1351. This he refused to do, and in the autumn of 1396 he sought refuge in the Genoese colony of Pera. His relocation to Pera gave him the freedom to voice openly his anti-Palamite instincts, as manifested in his substantial attack on the Tome of 1351, *On Essence and Energy*. It also saw his reception into the Roman Catholic Church. Kalekas offers a poignant example of the vulnerable position of anti-Palamites in the last years of Byzantium. It must, however, be stressed that it was his anti-Palamism and not his Latin interests per se that forced him to take refuge in the Roman Church.

³² *PG* 152:429–661. ³³ *PG* 152:473C–476A. ³⁴ *Ibid.* 508A–C. ³⁵ *Ibid.* 464B.

³⁶ Gouillard 1938: 44. ³⁷ *PG* 152:601C–604A. ³⁸ References in Gouillard 1938: 44.

Avowed anti-unionists could also be remarkably receptive to Thomas. Joseph Bryennios (c. 1350–1431/8), one of the most learned men of his time, is a fine example.³⁹ Bryennios' firm stance against union (and his allergy to theological syllogism) did not stop him from drawing on Thomas or indeed from admiring Demetrios Kydones and praising his translations to the skies.⁴⁰ Bryennios draws on the *Summa contra gentiles* 4.53 in his own *Dialogue with an Ishmaelite*, reproducing without acknowledgment several of the objections to the suitability of the Incarnation adduced by Thomas, adapting, abridging, and adding to them as appropriate. His answers, however, remain very much his own, albeit with occasional borrowings from the defense of the fittingness of the Incarnation in *Summa contra gentiles* 4.54–55.⁴¹ While there can be no compromise with Thomas on matters such as the procession of the Spirit, Bryennios finds him a useful ally in his dialogue with Islam.

In Makarios Makres (c. 1383–1431) we have a still more remarkable case of anti-unionist esteem for Thomas.⁴² Makarios, a learned Athonite *hieromonachos*, composed a series of anti-Islamic writings, notably a *Defence of Virginity*. In responding to the Islamic critique of celibacy, Makarios makes substantial use of Thomas' *Summa contra gentiles* in the Kydones translation. Like Bryennios, he borrows from Thomas' systematic formulation of possible objections but also reproduces large chunks of Thomas' arguments in favour of celibacy and follows him in his choice of supporting testimonies.⁴³ Makarios reworks his material but the unacknowledged dependence on Thomas remains marked. In Makres, even more clearly than in Bryennios, we see a veiled recognition of the immense value of Thomas' limpid defense of Christian doctrine and practice on the part of figures otherwise known for their hostility to the Latin Church. The willingness of such irreproachably anti-Latin figures to embrace Thomas, albeit with due caution and against a common enemy, is remarkable.

The considerable enthusiasm for Aquinas across party lines – Palamite and anti-Palamite, unionist and anti-unionist – shows that the Byzantine theological sphere was more subtle and complex than is often allowed. There was certainly no default setting of antipathy to Aquinas in any of the major theological camps of the Palaiologan era. Having said that, it must be acknowledged that Aquinas was not always welcomed into Byzantium with open arms. Matthew Angelos Panaretos, for example, produced a number of works in the 1350–1360s reacting to the success of the Greek translations of Thomas and against the pro-Latin policies of John V.⁴⁴ Two

³⁹ On Bryennios, see Tomadakes 1947; Bazini 2004: 83–87. ⁴⁰ Bryennios, *Letter 4*.

⁴¹ Argyriou 1986: 87–88. ⁴² Argyriou 1986 is an excellent introduction to Makres.

⁴³ *Summa contra gentiles* 3.136–37; Argyriou 1986: 86–92.

⁴⁴ Demetrakopoulos 1872: 48–53; ed. Risso 1914–1916; Buda 1956.

of his works are directed specifically against Thomas: one on the procession and one on purgatory. At the end of the second, a brief note reads as follows:

This Italian flourished at the time of the pious emperor Andronikos Palaiologos.⁴⁵ He had his home in Naples, belonged to the order of the Friar Preachers, and wrote much in his own language on the whole of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament . . . These works were unknown to the Church of New Rome and to all the Orthodox until the time of emperor John Kantakouzenos. Towards the end of his reign, a native of Thessalonike named Kydones, who knew Latin, translated them all into Greek. Some of these were transcribed by the emperor Kantakouzenos and placed in his library. If God gives me the time, I shall refute these works totally and utterly, both what he has written about the fire of purgatory and about the procession of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

In his work *On the Procession*, Panaretos attacks the *Ad cantorem Antiochenum*, in the Kydones translation. The treatise proceeds in methodical fashion, extracting theses from Thomas and meeting these with antitheses. Panaretos opens the debate with an insistence on the insufficiency of reason that unmistakably echoes with approval Thomas' own proscriptions in *Ad cantorem Antiochenum* 2. After this apparent homage, the treatise begins to dissect the arguments given by Thomas in defense of the reasonableness of the procession of the Spirit from Father and Son. Panaretos attacks Thomas for his reliance on philosophy but has no qualms in drawing on the authority of Anaxagoras to better him in debate. Panaretos judges that Thomas' identification of the intellect, love, and will of God with his essence is functionally Sabellian, erasing the real distinction of the persons. He finds the designation of the persons as "relations" wholly inadequate and incapable of expressing the unique characteristics of the three hypostases. Panaretos has left us a fine example of anti-Thomist polemic in the best tradition of Byzantine scholasticism. He dissects Thomas' arguments with care and attention, appealing to Scripture and the Fathers but also seeking to out-do Aquinas in his command of philosophy and logical argumentation. Panaretos delights in exposing Thomas' logical incoherence while simultaneously lambasting him for his reliance on logic, without ever noticing the irony of his position.

But while Panaretos can be rather curt in his disposal of Thomas, he is a model of reserve and decorum compared to the refutation of the *Summa contra gentiles* composed by Kallistos Angelikoudes. This enormous work, *Against Thomas Aquinas*, denounces no fewer than 2,000 extracts from Thomas over its 641 chapters. It announces its purpose as follows: "Against

⁴⁵ Andronikos II Palaiologos, r. 1282–1328, although proclaimed co-emperor in 1261.

⁴⁶ Text in Demettrakopoulos 1872: 48–49.

that which Thomas the Latin writes in heretical fashion and outside the chorus of the holy Church, a clear refutation of his arrogant disregard for holy scripture” (1). Thomas’ great sin is his reliance on pagan philosophy: time and time again he is reproached for having chosen Aristotle for his master and not heeded Scripture or the Fathers (641). In his wanton use of reason, Thomas has lapsed into the errors of Arius and Muhammad (2–3). The *Summa contra gentiles* is so full of lies and untruths, so beholden to empty profane wisdom, that it should be recognized as directed not against the pagans but against God’s holy Church (16–20). In his love for philosophy, Thomas has fallen prey to the demons (43). Kallistos’ is not an edifying work. And while it serves as a sign of the deep loathing for Latin theology present in certain sections of the Byzantine Church, it defeats itself in its failure to take Aquinas seriously and its overblown strictures against all reason and learning. Such instinctive hostility to the scholastic method is rare within Byzantine theological discourse.

Among others expressing unease with Aquinas is Makarios, metropolitan of Ancyra from 1397 to 1405. A close associate of the emperor Manuel II, Makarios composed a work *On the Errors of the Latins*, including a brief sideswipe at Thomas’ understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Demetrios Chrysoloras, also a member of the circle around Manuel II, reanimated the debate between Neilos Kabasilas and Demetrios Kydones by imaging it in the form of a dramatic dialogue in which the original protagonists are joined by Thomas and himself. Chrysoloras takes Kabasilas’ part, with Thomas criticized yet again for his rationalism, his love for the syllogism, and his views on the procession.⁴⁷ Chrysoloras insists that Neilos and Thomas have absolutely nothing in common and that Neilos must certainly be regarded as an opponent of Aquinas. Such protests indicate that Chrysoloras was aware of the positive dimension of Neilos’ reception of Thomas and concerned to eradicate any impression of even cautious sympathy for him.

AQUINAS BETWEEN UNIONISTS AND ANTI-UNIONISTS

In the run-up to the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439), Aquinas was used in some unionist circles as a weapon against the Orthodox, for instance by the Dominican convert Andrew Chrysoberges (d. 1451) whose *Apodeictic Exposition from the Writings of the Most Blessed Thomas concerning the Divine Essence and Energy* takes Thomas as a self-validating authority whose teachings are coterminous with those of the Roman Church as a whole. But the opponents of union did not necessarily concur

⁴⁷ Demetrakopoulos 1872: 88–89; Jugie 1928: 401; Papadopoulos 1982: 292; Podskalsky 1977: 216.

with such simplistic assertions of the utter incompatibility of Thomas with the teachings of the Orthodox Church, not least St. Mark (Eugenikos) of Ephesos (c. 1394–1445), the acknowledged leader of the anti-unionist party. While implacably opposed to any surrender to Latin positions on key matters such as the papacy, *filioque*, and purgatory, Mark was by no means hostile to Latin theology per se. Mark's approach to theology is distinctly scholastic in the traditional Byzantine mode. He was a forthright advocate of the theological syllogism, producing a set of works based expressly on the syllogism. Mark, in other words, was perfectly prepared to beat the Latins at their own game. This robust stance led him to take on Thomas directly in some of his works. Mark treats Thomas as the archetypal "teacher of the Latins" and shows a passing acquaintance with his work. He attacks Aquinas' notion of opposite relations within the Trinity, proposing instead the notion of "contradictory" relations between being uncaused and caused, begetting and proceeding – thereby upholding the absolute irreducibility of the three hypostases.⁴⁸

Mark's *Encyclical Letter* lays out some of the chief differences between Latins and Greeks, treating Thomas' teaching as synonymous with that of the Latin Church as a whole. Thus "the Latins and Thomas" are castigated for their belief in the identity of the divine will and essence and the concomitant understanding of the created nature of the divine operations (6.42–47). His *Syllogistic Chapters against the Heresy of the Akindynists concerning the Distinction between the Divine Essence and Energies* (14) also has Thomas as a chief target but nonetheless makes an intriguing (if unconvincing) attempt to manipulate him in support of the essence–energies distinction. Thomas, finally, crops up in Mark's *Second Homily against the Purgatorial Fire* (143), where he is upbraided as an Origenist for holding to the immutability of the will of souls after death. While Mark could hardly fail to offer some critique of Thomas in his dealings with the Latin positions on the disputed questions between east and west, it is highly significant that his approach remains temperate and respectful, including occasional attempts to recruit Thomas to the Orthodox cause. There is, in this archetypal defender of Orthodoxy, no trace of an awareness of fundamental incompatibility between Latin and Greek theological enterprises. But Mark's engagement with Aquinas was never a deep one. For a truly searching engagement with Thomas we have to turn to the man to whom Mark handed over the leadership of the anti-unionist party, George (Gennadios) Scholarios.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Syllogistic Chapters against the Latins on the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 13, 25 (76–77, 85–89) (cf. *ST I^a q. 36 a. 2*).

⁴⁹ Blanchet 2008; Barbour 1993.

Scholarios himself doubted whether Thomas had any more devoted disciple than he: "I do not think that any one of his followers has honoured Thomas Aquinas more than I; nor does anyone who becomes his follower need any other muse." He regarded his master as quite simply "the most excellent expositor and interpreter of Christian theology," valuing especially his impeccable grasp of philosophy (especially Aristotle) and his foundation in the universal patristic tradition.⁵⁰ Scholarios, who had mastered Latin at a young age, went on to translate a number of Aquinas' philosophical commentaries, including those on the *De anima* and the *Posterior Analytics* and the treatise *De esse et essentia*.⁵¹ He also drew on Aquinas in his *Defence of Aristotle*, a work directed against the radical Platonist George Gemistos Plethon, himself no friend of Aquinas.

Gennadios was never an uncritical reader and admits, in an early note of caution, that in "a few matters" Thomas differs from the teachings of the Orthodox Church. He argues, however, that such differences were not of Thomas' making but rather the product of circumstance.⁵² In a marginal note to his abridged version of the *Prima secundae* (made for ease of carriage) he bewails: "O excellent Thomas, if only you had not been born in the West, so that you had to justify the errors of that Church, both concerning the procession of the Spirit and the distinction between the divine essence and operation: then you would have been as infallible in theological matters as you are in this treatise on ethics."⁵³ In an *avis au lecteur* added somewhat later to the same translation, long after he had made a name as an opponent of Latin theological errors, Scholarios observes: "This Thomas, although he was Latin by race and doctrine, and thus differs from us in those things in which the Roman Church has in recent times innovated, is, in other respects, wise and profitable for those who read him." Where Thomas differs from the ancestral faith, he must be rejected, and Scholarios protests his own extensive and well-known contributions to such essential rebuttal. But Thomas remains of enormous value, as a witness to the universal patristic tradition and abiding value of classical Greek philosophy. As was the case with Demetrios Kydones, Scholarios was not welcoming in a foreign import but recognizing "one of us," albeit one in unfamiliar Latin costume. Scholarios was quite prepared to disagree with Aquinas on any matter on which he departed from the teachings of the Orthodox Church but he was also ready to take on board new doctrines to which the Orthodox Church had no definite objection, for example the doctrine of transubstantiation. The fact that

⁵⁰ Scholarios, *OC* 6.179.

⁵¹ On Gennadios and Thomas, see Jugie 1915; Barbour 1993; Podskalsky 1974; Salaville 1924.

⁵² Prooimion to the translation of Thomas' *De esse et essentia* (*Opus* 138): *OC* 6.179–80.

⁵³ Scholarios, *OC* 6.1.

Thomas was plain wrong on a number of counts – the *filioque*, the papal claims, the essence–energies distinction – in no way detracted, for Scholarios, from his supreme value to the Orthodox.

CONCLUSION

Aquinas enjoyed a remarkable *Nachleben* in Byzantium, attracting both admiration and, less often, antipathy in a remarkable range of thinkers. There was, in particular, no default setting of antipathy to Aquinas among either Palamites or anti-unionists. Aquinas found admirers among anti-unionists as well as unionists, Palamites as well as anti-Palamites. Indeed, there is scarcely a theologian of note in the later Palaiologan period who does not evince some knowledge of him. It was not wholly implausible for Demetrios Kydones to claim, as early as the 1360s, that “everyone today knows Thomas for the wealth of his writings, the loftiness of his thought, and the rigour of his syllogisms.”⁵⁴ This was, assuredly, an elite phenomenon, but this does not in any way diminish its intellectual significance. The Byzantines who welcomed Thomas did so in a critical fashion. They were perfectly capable of a sophisticated reading that involved no doctrinal compromise. They welcomed him not as an alien import from a superior culture but as one of their own, as an exceptionally able exponent of traditional Christian Aristotelianism rooted in Scripture and the patristic tradition – in other words, as a true Byzantine scholastic.

⁵⁴ *Apology* I, 362.2–4.

CHAPTER 33

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICS AT FERRARA-FLORENCE

MARIE-HÉLÈNE BLANCHET

The Council of Ferrara-Florence was convoked to put an end to the schism between the Latin Church and the various eastern churches. Between 1439 and 1445, this Council reached an accord between the papacy and the cardinals on the one hand and the heads of various eastern religious communities – the Byzantine, Armenian, Coptic, and several other churches – on the other. By its end, all of these churches were proclaimed to be reunited with Rome, and spiritual community between Latin and eastern Christians was deemed to have been fully restored – at any rate for the moment. In the context of a volume about the intellectual history of Byzantium, only one particular aspect of this Council will be treated, the meeting between westerners and Byzantines which led to the proclamation of the Union of Florence on 6 July 1439, and the reunion of the Latin and Byzantine Churches. More precisely, we will look at this reunion primarily from the Byzantine point of view and will analyze particularly the effect of the encounter with the Latins on the Greek protagonists, construing the Council as a significant stage in the history of Byzantine thought.

What was this strange world with which the members of the Greek delegation were confronted when they arrived in Italy? They met pope Eugenius IV (1431–1447), a large number of cardinals, Latin bishops, monks and religious, but there were also lay intellectuals, political figures, and artists who lived in Ferrara and Florence in the middle of the fifteenth century. The very name of these cities evokes the humanism of the Renaissance, and it is true that the Byzantines were suddenly thrust into contact with forms of occidental culture that were in the midst of a full-scale renewal and with leading representatives of many of the strands of this process of cultural transformation. There was a clear contrast between the modes of thinking and the values of the majority of the Byzantines, founded as they were on an absolute reverence for tradition, and those of their Latin interlocutors, who were much more favourably disposed to innovation in all domains. The Council was naturally enough the occasion for exchanges and discoveries in both directions. Thus, the western hosts of the Byzantine philosopher George Gemistos Plethon benefited greatly from his enthusiasm for and knowledge of the works of Plato, just as

certain Byzantines came to develop an interest in Latin thought, and in the monuments, institutions, and history of Florence.

However, this Council was above all a place for religious, or rather politico-religious, discussion, because we must consider what was at stake geopolitically, namely the promise of western military help for the Byzantines against the Turks in exchange for religious union. The principal doctrinal point of contention separating Latin and Orthodox Christians had arisen prior to the schism of 1054 and concerned the relations between the three persons of the Trinity: Did the Spirit proceed from the Father alone, as the Orthodox affirmed, or from the Father and the Son (*filioque*), as the Latins claimed? The question was central to the very definition of the Christian faith; without agreement on this point, the Latins and Byzantines would have agreed that they did not share a common faith, and each would have thought the other in error. The Council, therefore, was the occasion for reexamining with fresh eyes the different aspects of this theological controversy and for clarifying the ways in which a possible consensus might be attained. The debates centered as much on foundational questions of dogma as on the method to follow in theology, and so the criteria of truth and the means for attaining it, as well as the question of what kinds of argument were acceptable, were also subjected to criticism by both parties. This way of proceeding opened up the possibility of clear contradictions emerging between the positions articulated by each of the parties. This form of discussion, which was adopted in the public sessions of the Council, was quickly abandoned in favour of private meetings, where proper debate was avoided.

Direct contact with the Latins, such as took place at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, did profoundly and durably mark the Byzantines. This encounter should be considered as the culmination of a cultural rapprochement with the west which was initiated at the end of the thirteenth century, but also as a turning point in the relations between the two confessions, because the union eventually failed. In this chapter, we will try to understand the cleavages which made Latin thought seem strange to the majority of Byzantines, not necessarily incomprehensible, but very different from their own intellectual tradition.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Given its importance, the Council of Florence has been the object of numerous studies since the fifteenth century, which we must briefly summarize.¹ The very first stage, in the sixteenth century, consisted simply in the editing of the sources associated with it. Even at this stage significant

¹ Blanchet 2003: 5–48.

difficulties began to emerge. The official documentation of the sessions at Ferrara and Florence is lost. All that are preserved are some reports about the Council which include parts of the transcripts made by the Greek and Latin notaries in 1438–1439. One of these reports, usually called the *Acta Latina*, was prepared by Andrea da Santa Croce, a pontifical notary. Another report, which is called the *Acta Graeca*, was composed by one of the pro-union members of the Byzantine delegation in Florence, probably the metropolitan Dorotheos of Mytilene. These two sources contain parts of the discussion as it was actually conducted (i.e. transcripts made by Greek and Latin notaries, who were often bilingual, such as Nicholas Sekoundinos), but they do not reproduce these discussions fully and systematically because the latter were too lengthy to be written down *in toto*, so we do not actually have the full texts of what was said on each side. From the sixteenth century on, then, there have been two sources available, both unionist, which were published on the initiative of the papacy. There was, it seems, a deliberate attempt not to allow another Greek source, which was very hostile to union, the *Memoirs* of Sylvester Syropoulos, to get any kind of hearing.²

The historiography which resulted is marked by serious confessional prejudices. Catholics in the modern period have thought that they could extract from the discussions at Florence arguments that would convince certain members of the Orthodox Church to make the union with Rome a reality. This process began about the time when the Union of Brest, which was concluded in 1596, was being prepared. That is to say, knowledge about the meetings in Ferrara-Florence was to a large extent instrumentalized and the Council was considered a genuine success, a model to which one could refer to overcome the hesitations of schismatics. Until the middle of the twentieth century, this “optimistic” vision of the Council, seen as a place where Latin theology prevailed, was dominant in the Catholic milieu. The Orthodox, particularly the Greeks, obviously developed an interpretation of the Council that was completely opposed to this reading. They considered it to be an attempt by the Roman Church to bring about union by force without any acceptable theological basis. The more the western commentators insisted on the vitality and profundity of the discussions at the Council, the more the easterners denounced them as a mere sham.

Parallel to these divergences of interpretation, the cultural importance of the Council has gradually been recognized as its true value. The arrival of the Byzantines in 1438–1439 constitutes an important moment in the development of Greek studies in Italy and the rediscovery of ancient philosophers – not just Plato but also Aristotle in the original, and not

² Gill 1953; Hofmann 1955; Laurent 1971.

merely, as had previously been the case, in Latin translations from the Arabic. Putting aside the strictly religious approach to what happened at the Council, some historians have emphasized the importance of the exchanges between Latins and Greeks on this occasion, the influence of the Byzantines on the Florentine humanists, and the diffusion of Greek manuscripts. The culmination of this work was the 550th anniversary of the Council in 1989: a colloquium was organized in Florence which attempted to finally assess the significance of this visit by the Greeks for the history of the city.³

The same period saw advances in the domain of theology, especially under the influence of the ecumenical movement. For the conference held in Florence in 1989, G. Alberigo collected a large number of contributions that examine the antecedents of the Union of Florence, the difficulties of theological dialogue, and the reception of the Council in Orthodox countries.⁴ There are still differences of opinion among historians, and discussions about the authenticity of certain texts and their attribution are ongoing, but most specialists now accept that they must take account of all the sources whose authenticity is accepted, whether their tendency be unionist or anti-unionist.

THE THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

How may we come to an impartial understanding of what was at stake in the Council of Florence? The Latins expected the Greeks to recognize the monarchical position of the pope, that is, that the See of Rome had not merely precedence in honor, but authority over the Universal Church. As far as theology is concerned, in addition to the question of Purgatory, both Byzantines and Latins were concerned with the issues raised by the *filioque* clause in the Creed.⁵ This question was subdivided into two distinct debates of different kinds. On the one hand, there was a canonical question: What attitude was one to take toward the addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed (called, in Greek terminology, the “Symbolon” of faith)? Second, there was a doctrinal discussion about the procession of the Spirit in the Trinity. Globally speaking, we can note that throughout the Council the arguments employed appeal more frequently to the exegesis of or commentary on texts of Scripture, the Fathers, or previous Councils than to abstract developments in systematic theology. Debates between Latins and Greeks are couched more frequently in terms of philology or law than in terms of philosophy, at any rate the more metaphysical elements in philosophy. The discussion was about texts, their authenticity, their literal sense, the readings that one can or cannot give

³ Viti 1994. ⁴ Alberigo 1992. ⁵ Gill 1959; Chitarin 2002; Siecienski 2010: 151–172.

them, and the interpretations that it is or is not legitimate to propose. Thus, the meetings in Florence give us a good idea of the way in which theology was actually practiced at the end of the Middle Ages.

Whereas the Latin theologians seem to have been at ease in all of these registers, the Byzantines were much less experienced in debating and almost systematically fell back on incontestable authorities to support their theses. This confrontation had a disappointing result: most of the time each party remained in its own entrenched position, the Byzantines refusing to accept the authenticity of a given passage cited or the interpretation put on it by the Latins, while the Latins persisted despite this in appealing to it. Scholars have called the Council of Florence a “dialogue of the deaf,” but this is not exactly correct because each side did hear and understand the arguments of the other, but they thought these arguments neither relevant nor acceptable.

The first discussions were devoted to the question of Purgatory, namely the state of purification and temporary punishment after death. As it was understood by the Latins, the idea of Purgatory was suspect to the Greeks, who could not imagine that souls could exist in any kind of intermediary state between Hell and Paradise. The exchange led to an impasse, and so the Council turned to the principal question, the *filioque* clause. After an internal debate in which the main spokesman for Orthodoxy, the metropolitan of Ephesos, Markos Eugenikos, carried the day, the Byzantines demanded that the discussion begin by examining the canonical question of the addition of the *filioque* clause to the Creed, which had taken place without the authority of a Council. They felt that their position on this was invulnerable and wished to postpone until a later date the discussion of the participation of the Son in the procession of the Spirit.

Markos’ argument was simple: the Creed was formulated by the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea in 325; then it was put into its final form by the Fathers of the Council of Constantinople in 381. It became “inviolable” when the Fathers of the Council of Ephesos proclaimed it to be so in 431, prohibiting anyone from “composing a Creed” other than that defined by the *Symbolon* of Nicaea-Constantinople.⁶ In addition to this decision of the Council, there was a letter by Cyril of Alexandria, one of the principle protagonists of the Council of Ephesos, to John of Antioch, in which he specifically forbade anyone from changing even a syllable of the *Symbolon*.⁷

⁶ Tanner 1990: 65 (Council of Ephesos, canon VII): “it is not permitted to produce or write or compose any other Creed except the one which was defined by the Holy Fathers who were gathered together in the Holy Spirit at Nicaea.”

⁷ Tanner 1990: 73 (letter of Cyril of Alexandria to John of Antioch): “We do not permit anyone in any way to upset the defined faith or the Creed drawn up by the Holy Fathers who assembled at Nicaea as the times demanded. We give neither ourselves nor them the licence to alter any expression there or to change a single syllable.”

Consequently no one, not even a new Council, had the authority to modify the Creed or to introduce into it any new theological notions whatsoever. Markos invokes here the writings of participants in the Councils, in their capacity as the founders of the official theology of the Church. According to the rule formulated by the Fathers who took part in these Councils, no addition to the Creed was acceptable, and so the matter was closed. Markos here takes up again the Byzantine argument which had been developed by Photios as part of an anti-Latin polemic in the ninth century, and which was further elaborated by numerous other Orthodox theologians.

The Latins were on the defensive on this question because they were accused of violating a prohibition proclaimed by a Council. But their response was subtle and shows an engagement with the details of the texts cited by their opponents. To be sure, the Fathers of the Council opposed any intervention in matters of doctrine, but they did not necessarily forbid a different formulation of the faith: the text of the decree of the Council was thus more open to interpretation than the literalist reading given by Cyril of Alexandria might suggest – and his authority was clearly inferior to that of the Council itself. What was at issue in this discussion was the expression of dogmatic truth: Is it fixed, inscribed once and for all in “inviolable” texts or can it be reformulated, that is, made more explicit vis-à-vis points that are raised later? Does dogma develop? Isn’t fidelity to the spirit more important than respect for the letter? And consequently, doesn’t one risk falling back under a regime of law – the Law of the Old Testament, abolished by Christ – if one clings exclusively to rule-as-such? The Latins had no difficulty showing that in the historical past the faith had often been reformulated, starting with the reelaboration of the Nicene Creed by the Fathers of the Council of Constantinople. To this argument the Greeks responded by claiming that the prohibition did not enter into effect until after the Council of Ephesos and that it did not apply to all theological discussion, only to this particular text, the Creed, which was itself nothing but a summary of the dogmatic beliefs of the Universal Church.

The Latins then had recourse to another argument, that from necessity: to combat the Adoptionist heresies and reaffirm that the Son possessed divinity equal to that of the Father, they had been led to insist on the unity of the divine essence within the Trinity and on the participation of the Son with the Father in the procession of the Spirit. Arguments for this can already be found in the writings of Augustine, and as a result the position expressed in the *filioque* clause had gradually become the official doctrine of the Church. The Latins claimed that they had not innovated but merely made more explicit an aspect of Trinitarian theology that had already been developed by certain Fathers of the Church. Is an explication really an

addition if it is virtually contained in antecedent statements of doctrine? With this question the Latins insensibly moved the discussion toward an examination of the doctrine itself: in their view the *filioque* clause which they added was fundamentally acceptable and to that extent its addition could be justified. So they reversed the order in which the problem was to be examined: The Greeks thought that the addition of *filioque* to the Creed itself was inherently to be condemned because no Council could envisage any addition, even if the doctrine to which the addition gave expression turned out to be acceptable, whereas the Latins tried to show, to the contrary, that the prohibition against adding anything to the Creed could be considered relative, and thus, if the doctrine was acceptable, this was sufficient to justify the addition.

The debate once again reached an impasse: neither of the two camps could prevail and the meeting at Ferrara ended with the transfer of further discussion to Florence. These discussions showed, however, the need to focus on the doctrine itself. Starting in March 1439, the sessions in Florence were devoted to an examination of the arguments for and against a dual procession of the Spirit, from Father and Son.

Here too, combat was joined first on the exegetical level. The two parties knew that their respective patristic traditions treated this question differently, and that, on the Orthodox side, anti-Latin polemicists had already expressed criticisms of the *filioque* clause that amounted to a total condemnation of it. To some extent the Latins were on the defensive here too, in that they had the burden of proving to the Greeks that their own doctrine was not heretical. The effective rebuttal of the charge of heresy was in any case the main expected result of the Council, as there was never any question that the Byzantine Church would adopt the Latin *filioque* clause. The Byzantines would on no account concede anything more than a mere acknowledgment that the *filioque* clause was not a doctrinal error.

Among the many possible ways of justifying their theology, the representatives of the Latin Church chose what one might call the “Dominican method,” which was founded on the use of the writings of the Greek Fathers. The Latin spokesman in these debates, Giovanni da Montenero, was himself a Dominican and was able to rely for support on the work of Ambrogio Traversari, the prior general of the Camaldule Order and a humanist, the author of numerous translations of patristic Greek texts. From the fourteenth century onward, the Preaching Friars of the convent of Pera – a colony of Genoa next to Constantinople – had accumulated much scholarly knowledge of the writings of the Greek Fathers. They had translated into Latin and studied a large number of Greek treatises, especially works by the Cappadocian Fathers, searching through these texts for arguments to support their own doctrine. If they could succeed in showing that the Greek Fathers themselves had defended the dual

procession of the Spirit, they hoped to be able to convince the Byzantines. They hoped that they could do this by appealing to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers among themselves, the *consensus patrum*. The Fathers were thought never to contradict each other, so if even one of them had explicitly given an argument in favor of the view that the Son participated in the procession of the Spirit, the others could not have been in disagreement. This was the terrain – an examination of the writings of the Greek Fathers – on which the discussion took place at Florence. It was only marginally concerned with the interpretation of Latin patristic texts, and even less often did it become a dispute in which theoretical arguments were exchanged in the form of syllogisms.

Is there, then, any Greek Father who defended the idea that the Spirit proceeds equally from the Father and the Son? When they treated this question, the Orthodox understood the word “proceed” (*ekporeuomai*) in a precise sense: “The Spirit proceeds from the Father” means that it has its being eternally from the Father (*ek Patros*), that it comes from the Father in as much as the Father is the source of its divinity. This affirmation concerns specifically the domain of the reciprocal relations among the persons of the Trinity, the three hypostases which are the Father, Son, and Spirit. The hypostasis of the Father has as its fundamental property to be at the origin of the other two persons of the Trinity: it is the origin of the Son because the Father engenders the Son and the origin of the Spirit because the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Father is thus the only person of the Trinity to confer the divine essence on the other persons. For this reason, Byzantine theologians spoke of the “monarchy” of the Father, because he is the only principle of divinity. In this schema, it is illogical to claim that the Son might also participate in the procession of the Spirit because this would mean that he, too, was a principle of divinity within the Trinity. The consequence of this would be that there are two principles of divinity within the Trinity, the Father and the Son. This in turn would imply the existence of a dyarchy, a position very close to polytheism; it would also destroy the equilibrium among the three persons of the Trinity to the disadvantage of the hypostasis of the Spirit.

To be sure, in another domain, that of the history of salvation, also called “divine economy,” the role of the Son is fully recognized: The Father sacrificed his Son to redeem mankind and the Son announced that he would send to men “the Spirit from the Father.” This is what Jesus says in the Gospel of John 15:26, and because of this passage from Scripture no theologian would contest the participation of the Son in sending out the Spirit into the world. The Spirit is, thus, transmitted to men “by the Son” (*dia tou hyiou*). The majority of Greek theologians adopted this interpretation, which clearly separates the two registers: that of the eternal relations within the Trinity and that of the history of divine economy. In the

background here, we find also the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies which was developed by Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, but this point was deliberately excluded from discussion in Florence. The essential part of Greek criticism of the *filioque* clause, both before and after the Council, rested on this argument.

Nevertheless, the Latins were able to show that certain Greek Fathers did develop a theology that approached very closely to that of the Latins and, in the final analysis, certainly did not contradict it. Some of these Greek Fathers did in fact use the formula: the Spirit proceeds “from the Son” (*ek tou byiou*). This expression is strictly equivalent to “ex filio” and parallel to “ek patros.” Thus Giovanni da Montenero cites the treatise by Epiphanius entitled *Ancoratus*. In his attempt to demonstrate the equal divinity of the three persons, Epiphanius said: “The Holy-Spirit is from both (*ex amphoin*)” and “no one knows the Spirit except the Father and the Son, from whom it receives and proceeds (*aph' ou lambanei kai aph' ou ekporeuetai*).” Markos of Ephesos rejected the Latin interpretation of these quotations and there followed a long discussion of the meaning and function of each word, especially of the fact that *aph'ou* was singular, of the equivalence or lack of equivalence of the prepositions employed (*ek*, but also *apo* and *para*), of the absence of a direct object for the verbs “receive” and “proceed,” so that one should not necessarily understand in this sentence that the Spirit receives its being from the Father and the Son.

This discussion is a good example of the form taken by the debate between Giovanni da Montenero and Markos of Ephesos. When later a passage from the *Against Eunomios* of Basil of Caesarea was cited, stating that “the Spirit has its being from the Son and receives it from him,” Markos of Ephesos denied the authenticity of the passage and branded it an interpolation. Several manuscripts of this treatise were brought into the session and compared and it was confirmed that the oldest contained the passage, but that certain more recent ones lacked it: we know now that it actually is an interpolation, but it dates from the seventh century and thus was not the result of any manipulation by the Latins.⁸

In short, Markos of Ephesos reproached the Latin theologians for distorting the sense of the Greek quotations they used in order to make them say something impossible, namely that the Spirit proceeds from the other two persons of the Trinity. However, the other Byzantine spokesman at the Council, Bessarion, was convinced by the quotations from the Greek Fathers invoked by the Latins. He agreed that their theology was more complex than the caricature which the Byzantines often gave of it: The Latins claimed not at all that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as two persons, but rather that it proceeds from Father and

⁸ Alexakis 2000: 149–165.

Son considered as a single and identical divine principle. In contrast to the Orthodox who were very attached to a personalist conception of the Trinity, the Latins considered the unity of the divine essence within the Trinity to be primordial. On this interpretation, which is much more abstract, it seems possible that the Spirit has its being from the common essence of Father and Son; thus the texts should be taken as referring not on the one hand to the Father and on the other hand also to the Son, but to Father and Son insofar as they are really one. Thus, it does not follow that the Spirit has two causes; it proceeds from the Father, but by virtue of the divine nature of the Son he too participates in the procession. Such an idea was not unacceptable for some Orthodox theologians who followed in the intellectual footsteps of Nikephoros Blemmydes, but according to the most rigorous form of Orthodox theology the procession had to be conceived as starting from a person, a hypostasis, and that meant necessarily from the hypostasis of the Father.

The discussions of the *filioque* clause did not result in any consensus, and, starting from the end of March 1439, the public sessions of the Council were replaced by limited discussions among representatives of each camp. The area of mutual agreement that was eventually found consisted in distinguishing a main cause and a mediate cause in the procession of the Spirit, where the mediate cause was not a second cause: The Spirit proceeds from the Father through the mediation of the Son, who therefore also participates in the procession, in the same way in which light proceeds from the sun by passing through a sunbeam. This idea agrees with a formulation current among the Greek Fathers: The Spirit proceeds from the Father (*ek patros*) through the Son (*dia tou hyiou*). The union of the Churches could thus be realized by proclaiming that the expression ‘through the Son’ (*dia tou hyiou*) was equivalent to the Latin “ex filio” and referred to the participation of the Son in the procession of the Spirit. However, this equivalence of the prepositions “dia” and “ex” is really artificial, because for the most exact theologians the mediating role of the Son is a role not in the procession of the Spirit, but in the sending of the Spirit out into the world.

The religious discussions during the Council revealed a variety of different modes of thinking and reasoning. The Latin Church emerged from them, if not completely victorious then at any rate in a distinctly improved situation, because not only was the *filioque* clause recognized as valid by the Orthodox, but papal primacy and infallibility were also explicitly mentioned in the final decree. On the Byzantine side, the agreement was seen by many as a humiliation, and some members of the delegation withdrew their agreement to the union immediately upon their return to Constantinople. In the empire, but also in the Balkans, and even in Russia, the religious conflict surrounding the decisions of

Florence only increased during the 1440s. Nevertheless, the union was finally proclaimed in Constantinople on the eve of the fall of the city on 12 December 1452, and was not rejected officially until the pan-Orthodox Synod convoked in 1484. Yet it would be wrong simply to contrast an Orthodox camp to a Latin one: Certain Byzantines were convinced by the arguments of the Latins, not only Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev, both of whom were made cardinals, but also a part of the mass of the Orthodox population, so that a unionist current never disappeared completely in the Greek world. In the west, by contrast, scholastic theology, which had been triumphant in the sessions at Florence, began to be contested and rejected on the grounds that it was too complex and too artificial. Starting with the first edition of his treatise entitled *Dialectics* in 1439, the humanist Lorenzo Valla presented a radical critique of contemporary scholasticism and even went so far as to adopt the Greek point of view on the Trinity.⁹ Obviously influence went in both directions and the direct contacts between Latins and Byzantines only intensified these exchanges.

CULTURAL EXCHANGES AND THE DIFFUSION OF HUMANISM

We have seen the importance of philological criticism in these religious discussions: texts of the Fathers and of the Councils have their authenticity verified, the existing different versions are compared to each other, and interpolations are carefully distinguished from authentic passages. These practices, which depended on the existence of forms of textual criticism, were not new for either the Byzantines or the Latins, but they were brought to a new level because of the decisive importance of establishing the exact text. Increased requirements of authenticity and exactitude implied an assiduous quest for the most reliable manuscript, that is a search for the oldest manuscripts, and this was an assumption made by all parties to the discussion. In Florence between 1438 and 1439, scholars were intensely occupied with the consultation and copying of Greek manuscripts, and so, from this point of view, the Council of Florence, just as before it those of Basel and Constance, can be considered to be veritable book-fairs. But these activities continued even after the end of the Council, both in Italy and in Constantinople, because they were needed for the purposes of effective polemic. Unknown testimonia were exhumed from libraries, forgotten works were rediscovered, any manuscript one could find was systematically copied. This intellectual attitude, in part engendered by religious controversy, was at the heart of the attempt to rediscover ancient texts – in fact, mostly Greek texts – an attempt which characterizes both

⁹ Cappelli 2010.

the western Renaissance and also the “Palaiologan Renaissance” in Byzantium.

This appetite for reading extended far beyond the domain of religious faith and directed itself particularly toward philosophical works. Before their departure, the Byzantines had collected at Constantinople and even on Mount Athos a large number of books in preparation for the discussions with the Latins; they arrived in Italy laden with manuscripts, not just religious manuscripts but also secular ones. It was they who acquainted the Latins with the original treatises of Aristotle and especially with the works of Plato which were at that time not well known in the west. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Manuel Chrysoloras had translated into Latin with the help of the Milanese humanist Uberto Decembrio the *Republic* of Plato, but this rather clumsy version was hard to understand, and many of Plato’s other dialogues were still completely unknown. Only a few had been made accessible thanks to Leonardo Bruni, a pupil of Chrysoloras, who had recently translated the *Phaedo*, the *Gorgias*, the *Crito*, and a part of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. We know that the manuscript of the complete works of Plato which Marsilius Ficino later used in his translation had been acquired by Cosimo dei Medici at the time of the Council. He then put it at the disposal of Ficino, who, in the preface to his *Commentaries on Plotinus* of 1490, claimed that Cosimo in 1439, under the influence of the Greeks, especially Plethon, had envisaged the creation of a Platonic Academy in Florence. The very existence of such an academy is nowadays contested and the meeting between Cosimo and Plethon is also conjectural.¹⁰

The influence of the Byzantine philosopher on some Latin humanists, however, is generally accepted, even if one might hesitate to group Plethon himself, who was already of a very advanced age, among the humanists, because he belonged to a Platonic tradition that had never really disappeared in Byzantium. The generation of Italian scholars whom he met, some of whom had learned Greek from Manuel Chrysoloras in Florence or in Lombardy, was able and keen to discuss philosophy with Greeks. In 1438–1439, we know that Plethon met the physician and philosopher Ugo Benzi and the abbot of Grottaferrata Pietro Vitali de Calabria, because he cites them by name, and also the mathematician Paolo Toscanelli. Finally he certainly met Leonardo Bruni, who was chancellor of the Republic of Florence at the time of the Council. At a banquet, a debate about the respective merits of Plato and Aristotle had awarded the palm to the latter and Plethon undertook to compose a treatise *On the Differences between Plato and Aristotle*,¹¹ in order to prove Plato’s superiority. He himself attests that he composed this work during the Council, after

¹⁰ Hankins 1990a: 144–162. ¹¹ Lagarde 1973: 312–343. See Chapter 37.

discussions with Italians, and at the behest of some Latin admirers of Plato. Plethon thus initiated a polemic which was to occupy the whole second half of the fifteenth century, and which saw opponents and partisans of Plato locked in combat. George Gennadios Scholarios was the first to reply to Plethon's treatise and defend Aristotle, then Plethon wrote a counter-reply. Then it was George of Trebizond who took up the cudgels in favour of Aristotle, and was in turn attacked by Bessarion, a former student of Plethon and partisan of Platonic thought which he held to be compatible with Christian theology. The Byzantine disagreement which started out in Greek continued in Latin, moving to Italy and providing fertile nourishment for further thought by western intellectuals.

The exchanges between westerners and Byzantines during the Council also touched upon political philosophy. Witness to this is a small work composed directly in Greek by one of the greatest Florentine humanists of the age, Leonardo Bruni.¹² It is a succinct description of the institutions of Florence using categories defined by Aristotle in his *Politics*, which Bruni had just translated into Latin. This work, *On the Constitution of the Florentines*, is dedicated to a Byzantine. The oldest manuscript, which is probably contemporaneous with the composition of the work (about 1439) and is preserved today in Florence, gives the name of the dedicatee as George Amiroutzes. He was one of the highest dignitaries of the empire of the Grand Komnenoi at Trebizond and an eminent representative of Byzantine Aristotelianism, who was present at Florence as a lay advisor of the emperor John VIII Palaiologos. However, according to a later manuscript now in Munich, the work is supposed to have in fact been dedicated to Bessarion. Some have even claimed that the real addressee was none other than Plethon, since we possess a manuscript of the work heavily annotated in his own hand, which is preserved in the Marciana Library in Venice in the collection given to that library by Bessarion himself. Whoever the dedicatee, the work was clearly a response to a request by a Byzantine, because Bruni opens his treatise with the words: "Since you desire to know what type of constitution our city has and how it is organised, I shall try to describe this to you as clearly as I can." So some Byzantines were curious about a political regime that was different from their own, which was still based on an imperial ideology inherited from the Christianized Roman empire. Bruni describes a republican form of government founded on a sharing of power between the people and the aristocracy, while admitting that the aristocrats had gradually been able to impose their political dominance to the detriment of democratic tendencies. This information might well have been food for thought for Byzantine intellectuals who were threatened with the disappearance of

¹² Moulakis 1986: 141–190.

their empire and its possible replacement by political entities that were organized on a much smaller scale, that of the region or even the city, especially in the Peloponnese. There can be little doubt but that Bruni's text directly influenced Chalkokondyles, who in his *History* gave a detailed description of Florentine institutions and showed a positive predisposition in favour of this Italian city and its constitution.¹³

Apart from these widely recognized traces of contact, the Greek sources are stingy with information about the attitude of the Byzantines toward their Latin interlocutors. Most of these intellectuals were in any case not in a position to communicate directly with each other, but needed the help of interpreters. This role was discharged by the notaries of the Council, such as Nicholas Sekoundinos, some Greek converts to Latin Christianity, in particular Andrew Chrysoberges, and a small number of bilingual Latins, such as Ambrogio Traversari and Leonardo Bruni. On the Byzantine side, virtually no one spoke Latin, except, according to his own statement, George Scholarios. But the exchanges that he had in Italy with Latins seem to have been limited. We have only one letter to Ambrogio Traversari, and Plethon ridiculed him for being so withdrawn during the Byzantines' stay in Italy. Scholarios apparently refused most of the time to mix with his western hosts. In fact, it seems that the Greeks in general spent most of their time with each other and avoided any kind of familiarity with the Latins.

It is even probable that certain Byzantines were extremely displeased by what they discovered in Italy. On this point we have only one testimony, that of Syropolos, on the attitude of the confessor Gregory Mammias. When the patriarch asked to be permitted to celebrate the Byzantine liturgy in a Latin church, he said:

As far as I am concerned, when I enter a Latin Church, I do not venerate any of the saints I find there because I can't recognise any of them. Doubtless, there is a Christ, the only one I recognise, but I can't worship him either because I don't understand the content of the epigraphy. Under the circumstances I simply make the sign of the Cross and worship. Yes, it is the sign of the Cross which I trace on myself that I worship, not anything else that presents itself to my gaze.¹⁴

Mammias is actually one of those who later adhered to the union and was expressing here nothing but his sense of the strangeness of western religiosity and iconography. However, one can also find in authors of the same period an explicit condemnation of Latin sacred art precisely because they claim it has lost its sacred dimension.¹⁵ Symeon of Thessalonike, in his *Dialogue against Heresies* written at the beginning of the fifteenth century,

¹³ Pontani 1994: 773. ¹⁴ Laurent 1971: 250–251. ¹⁵ Pontani 1994: 776–812.

criticizes the Latins for having abandoned the idea of a necessary and essential connection between that which is represented and its divine model. According to the Orthodox theology of the icon, in fact, the image has as its function to permit anyone who contemplates it to approach its prototype spiritually, whether this prototype be a saint, the Virgin, or Christ; the Latins, on the other hand, cared about nothing but making their representations more and more beautiful, and artistic skill for them became an end in itself.

What would a Byzantine have thought of Florentine artworks of the period, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* by Gentile da Fabriano, where the whole scene is nothing but a pretext for representing the magnificence of the city's aristocracy? Or the frescoes of Masaccio which are so striking in their realism and expressivity? Would they not have been shocked by nude representations of biblical characters, for instance Adam and Eve in the chapel of Brancacci or the David of Donatello, a graceful young man standing proudly with his weight on one leg? These representations had nothing in common with the traditional Orthodox stereotypes. Naturalistic representation of the world, which had become possible partly due to the invention of perspective, could not but be incompatible with the Byzantine concept of the image as a reflection of supersensible reality. Italian art in the middle of the fifteenth century which glorified physical beauty so elegantly, in the ancient manner, in the end held up to the spectator a mirror in which he could admire himself. This way of presenting terrestrial life and an idealized humanity no longer had anything to do with art as a mere propaedeutic to prayer and mysticism, as the Byzantines conceived it.

In the summer of 1439, when they left Florence, the Byzantines were much more divided among themselves than they had been when they arrived.¹⁶ Almost all of them had approved the union, but a majority of those who did only did so under the pressure of the moment and against their better judgment. The union with the Latins became a major source of division among the Byzantine elites. Some of them, who had been impressed by what they had discovered about the Latin world, argued with genuine conviction for a cultural, religious, and political rapprochement with the west. All of these dimensions were, of course, indissolubly interconnected. These Byzantine intellectuals thought that the historical relations between western and eastern Christianity were more important than their differences, and they wished to have Latin help in preserving the Greek heritage. Those who held this view left the Byzantine empire and established themselves in the west. Without a doubt the most striking figure among them is Bessarion, but he was also followed by others who

¹⁶ Ševčenko 1955: 3–35.

were not present at the Council, such as Theodore of Gaza and John Argyropoulos, who played an important role later in the Renaissance. On the other hand, certain Byzantines, especially those who were close to ecclesiastical circles, refused to compromise and abandon their own values and beliefs for those of the west. They fought for the survival of the empire until its fall in 1453 and thereafter had to make their peace with the Turks. The most representative figure among this group was George Scholarios, who became the first patriarch of Constantinople under Ottoman rule. Plethon is an anomaly in this picture. Feted and admired by the Italian humanists as a *maestro*, he nevertheless opposed the union before returning to the Peloponnese where he secretly wrote his magnum opus, *The Laws*, without apparently retaining any contact with westerners. For the Byzantines as a whole, the sense of belonging to one or the other tradition becomes more acute and is reinforced following the Council of Florence. Each must choose his camp, either to adhere to the union and “become a Latin” or to refuse to do so and safeguard Greek Orthodoxy no matter what the price.

PART VI
POLITICS AND HISTORY

CHAPTER 34

BASILEIA: THE IDEA OF MONARCHY IN BYZANTIUM, 600–1200

PAUL MAGDALINO

The middle Byzantine period (c. 600–1200) was the golden age of the Byzantine imperial monarchy. In this period the Empire of New Rome achieved its highest level of political cohesion and common identity as a state centered upon the emperor in Constantinople.¹ The late antique emperors, of whom Constantine, Theodosius, and Justinian were emblematic, had wielded immense resources and built up a formidable ideology of absolute monarchical power, yet they ruled a vast, heterogeneous collection of culturally diverse and inward-looking communities. From the late twelfth century, and especially after the crusader capture of Constantinople in 1204, internal forces of disintegration and centrifugal drift prevailed under the impact of outside aggression. Regional separatism, aristocratic factionalism, class conflict, and religious schism undermined the unity and the credibility of the monarchical system. It was thus in the period between late antiquity and the later Middle Ages that this system came closest to perfection. From an ideological perspective, it was during the era of the clash of monotheisms, from Muhammad to the failure of the crusades, that the political ideology generated by monotheism in late antiquity came closest to the reality of a Christian Roman empire.²

What was distinctive about middle Byzantine ideas of the monarchical ideal? Perhaps the most striking feature of middle Byzantine political culture is the paucity of political theory: the dearth of treatises on government and of philosophical discussions about the ideal constitution and the function of the state. This might be regarded as a reflection of the relative perfection of the system: the merits of monarchy were too self-evident to need justification or provoke serious debate. A related point is that since, as we shall see, the Byzantine state was officially considered, from the seventh century, to be a theocracy, monarchical theory pertained essentially to divine kingship and therefore belonged to the realm of theology. It is not that Byzantines lacked an intellectual conception of political monarchy; on the contrary, the ideal of monarchy pervaded their collective imagination,

¹ For the political history of the period, see the relevant chapters in Shepard 2007.

² Fowden 1993.

dominated their cultural output, and was fundamental to their self-presentation. The distinctive feature of their political thought is that it was not solely or even primarily distilled into abstract statements, but embedded in the actions, contexts, and representations of the political performers.

The Byzantine monarchical ideal, and its antithesis, were constructed with reference to individual emperors. These emperors were, in the first instance, the reigning sovereign and his immediate predecessors, but they also included the most famous and infamous rulers from the more distant past, among whom the founding fathers of the Christian empire loomed larger than life. Towering over all of them was Constantine the Great, who as the first Christian emperor, the convener of the first Ecumenical Council to defend Orthodoxy against heresy, and the founder of Constantinople, was the only ruler to be canonized as a saint by the Byzantine Church.³ Yet other early Byzantine emperors also achieved iconic status in the middle period, most notably Justinian I (527–565), remembered as the builder of Hagia Sophia. A perfect illustration is to be found in the ninth- or tenth-century mosaic that adorns the southwest vestibule of the building. The mosaic depicts Justinian, builder of the church, along with Constantine, founder of Constantinople, in the act of dedicating their respective foundations to an enthroned Virgin and Christ-child. Here the abstract ideal of *basileia* is both personified by the great emperors of the past and reified in the imperial city and its great cathedral church, as well as being defined in subordinate relationship to the Kingdom of God.⁴

As the vestibule mosaic of Hagia Sophia makes clear, ideas of monarchy circulated in images and rituals as well as words. We privilege verbal expression as the medium of intellectual discourse, but we should bear in mind that, for purposes of publicity, the same points could be conveyed just as effectively, and disseminated more widely, by visual depiction and ceremonial performance.⁵ It is perhaps more helpful to categorize representations of monarchy in terms of their sources. In the first place were those issued by the reigning monarch in person or in his or her name. Among written documents, these included laws, letters, victory bulletins, charters of donation, publicly inscribed imperial announcements, and treatises, testaments, or orations nominally authored by the emperor; in other media, we may list the buildings, pictures, and rituals authorized by imperial command. A second category consists of representations of the emperor that were produced on the initiative of some governmental or ecclesiastical office. Here we may instance all orations, memoranda, portraits, and ceremonial events that were organized in the emperor's service

³ Dagron 2003: 127–157. ⁴ Whittemore 1936; Lowden 1997: 190–193; Dagron 2003: 99.

⁵ Grabar 1936; Magdalino and Nelson 1982; Dagron 2003: 54–124.

and honor and were referred to him for his approval. Thirdly, we may distinguish the written output of private individuals and institutions who were writing and acting without any direct official authorization, and whose observations on past and present rulers, even if addressed to the current emperor, may or may not have come to his attention. They included all unsolicited petitions, eulogies, and advice literature; otherwise, the writings in this category referred to the emperor in the third person and to imperial power as something external to the author. These are the texts that we privilege as descriptions of imperial politics and expressions of political thought: the many historical narratives that are the glory of Byzantine literature, and the rather less numerous theoretical discussions of monarchical power and its limits.

This categorization allows us to distinguish between official and unofficial representations of *basileia* and, within the official category, between the emperor's own conception of his power and the conception that was imposed on him by the weight of tradition and consensus among the bureaucracy of Church and state. However, we should recognize that the categories were as likely to merge as to separate. The emperor depended upon bureaucratic tradition for the language and the arguments to justify his exercise of power. His officials had to strike a balance between what he wanted and what the system of tradition and consensus dictated. Few, if any, literate Byzantines who wrote on politics were entirely outside the system, and the great majority were either officials or ex-officials. Thus Byzantine conceptions of *basileia* tended to gravitate toward the middle ground between the ruler who believed he had a divine mandate to do exactly as he pleased and his critics who emphasized his accountability. Both the idea of the divine mandate and the notion of monarchical accountability fluctuated considerably in the period under review, as we shall see, but again the vestibule mosaic of Hagia Sophia may be cited to illustrate the enduring stability of the middle ground.

From another perspective, the sources of political thought may be understood in terms of the three ancient civilizations from which Byzantium famously blended its unique identity: the Hellenic, the Roman, and the Judeo-Christian. From Greek antiquity and the constitutions of the classical *polis*, the Byzantines derived the philosophical terms and the rhetorical tools for idealizing monarchy in relation to other forms of constitution, for defining the qualities of the ideal monarch and his antithesis, the tyrant, and for framing the justification of all political decisions.⁶ Greek history and mythology also provided Byzantium with archetypes of monarchy or tyranny, the most illustrious being Alexander the Great, who was widely known not only from the history books, but also

⁶ Dvornik 1966: 132–277; Canepa 2009.

from a romantic, legendary biography that circulated in multiple versions and many languages.⁷ Alexander gripped the medieval imagination as a heroic world conqueror, and most notably as the conqueror of Persia, who had both terminated and adopted the oriental despotism of the Achaemenid monarchy. Alexander thereby set a precedent not only for the universal claims of the Byzantine empire, but also for the ambiguous Byzantine attitudes to the political culture of the Persian empire in its later manifestations, under the Sasanian dynasty and the Islamic caliphate.⁸ Largely via Alexander, Byzantines continued to regard the Persian monarchy both as the barbarian “other” and as the prototype of their own court culture of luxurious, hierarchical magnificence.⁹ Their fascination with Persia as the ancient monarchy par excellence was reinforced, for the classically educated, by Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus*, an idealized biography of the founder of the Achaemenid empire that was widely appreciated both as good Greek style and as a portrait of successful rulership.¹⁰

In this ambiguous perception of oriental despotism, Greek ideas of *basileia* reinforced the values of the Roman institutional tradition that was the second main strand of Byzantine identity. The Byzantine polity derived its secular constituents entirely from the Roman empire: the ritual election of the emperor by the army and by the senate and people of Constantinople, which was officially designated New Rome very early in its history and imitated Rome in its monumental topography.¹¹ The legal system, as reissued by Justinian in the *Corpus juris civilis*, was entirely Roman, and the same was believed of the monetary and fiscal system.¹² Byzantium inherited the Roman cult of military Victory as the decisive attribute of the legitimate emperor.¹³ The title of *autokrator*, which the Byzantine emperor used in his official signature along with that of *basileus*, was the equivalent of the Roman *imperator*.¹⁴ Like Greek history, the history of ancient Rome provided Byzantines with exempla and precedents, including the knowledge that the Roman monarchy had originated in the constitution of the Roman Republic.¹⁵ Yet it is significant that all this information on ancient Rome came entirely from Greek sources, and the most familiar details were the references to Roman authority in the New Testament.

This brings us to the third important cultural source for Byzantine ideas of *basileia*: the Septuagint Greek version of the Jewish Bible, its Christian

⁷ Stoneman 2008; Jouanno 2000. ⁸ See Chapter 5.

⁹ For the background, see Dvornik 1966: 73–131. ¹⁰ Gera 1993.

¹¹ Beck 1966; 1970; Kaldellis 2015b.

¹² Law: Humphreys 2015: 11–25; a monetary treatise used by tax officials of the eleventh century attributes the traditional system to Caesar Augustus: Morrisson 1979: 422–443.

¹³ McCormick 1986. ¹⁴ The best discussion of Byzantine imperial titulature is still Chrysos 1978.

¹⁵ Markopoulos 2006.

supplement, the non-canonical Scriptures, and the whole subsequent literature of scriptural imitation and exegesis, in which the authors canonized as Church Fathers were highly influential. Through liturgical readings, hymns, sermons, and catechisms, the biblical tradition repeatedly bombarded all Byzantine Christians and Jews with the idea of monarchy and with references to historical kingdoms and their rulers.¹⁶ Thus the average Byzantine became acquainted with the great ancient empires of the Near East: the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the Assyria of Sennacherib, the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, the Persia of Cyrus, the Seleucid kingdom of Antiochos Epiphanes. It was from exegesis of the Book of Daniel that the Byzantines ultimately derived their idea of world history as a succession of global empires, in which their own state, the Roman empire, was to be the greatest and the last.¹⁷ Most importantly, the Bible introduced them to the monarchy that they regarded as the prefiguration of their own: the Davidic Kingdom of Israel, whose heritage they claimed as the Chosen People of the New Testament.¹⁸ From the Books of Kings, they took the positive images of David and Solomon, the negative exempla of sinful kings such as Saul, Ahab, and Manasseh, and the deplorable precedent of a kingdom divided in two; they also retained the role of the king as the builder of the Temple and, more generally, the ideal kingdom as a collaboration between the kingship and the high priesthood. In this context, other Old Testament leaders served as role models, notably Melchizedek and Moses before the Kingdom, and Zerubbabel and the Maccabees in the post-exilic period. Moreover, the prophetic books of the Old Testament that expressed the dream of a Messianic restoration of the Kingdom of Israel conflated this with the idea of an eschatological Kingdom of God, which was further developed in the New Testament and to which Byzantine imperial ideology was highly receptive.¹⁹ Christ had famously declared that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), yet it is a truism that Byzantine court ceremonial sought to imitate the order and harmony of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that Byzantium aspired to appear as heaven on earth, although the eschatological implications of the aspiration are rarely appreciated.²⁰

The biblical model of kingship, fused with the Roman ideal of imperial Victory, was arguably the most inspirational ingredient in the Byzantine conception of monarchy, and the story of its adoption provides the most coherent narrative in the development of Byzantine political ideology. The intellectual history of *basileia* in the Greek Middle Ages may be

¹⁶ For the biblical sources of Byzantine political thought, see Dvornik 1966: 278–452.

¹⁷ Podskalsky 1972. ¹⁸ Magdalino and Nelson 2010: 1–38; Rapp 2010.

¹⁹ Alexander 1985: 174–184; Magdalino 2014.

²⁰ MacCormack 1982; the idea is reflected in the titles of recent volumes on Byzantine art: Safran 1998; Drandaki, Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and Tourta 2013.

written in terms of a project to repackage the Roman empire as a Messianic kingdom. The project was announced in the fourth century but did not take off until the seventh; peaking in the ninth and tenth centuries, it was never abandoned, but gradually lost momentum as the empire lost its sense of universal mission and its publicists increasingly regarded their monarchy through the rational, humanist prism of their philosophical, rhetorical, and legal education.

The idea that the Christian Roman empire had a Messianic mission to institute the kingdom of God on earth effectively began with Eusebios of Caesarea, in his works in praise of Constantine.²¹ Eusebios hailed Constantine as the inaugurator of a new golden age, who through his conversion completed the convergence of divine monarchy with earthly monarchy that was announced by the coincidence of Christ's Incarnation with the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. According to his Christian apologist, Constantine united the two monarchies as God's deputy on earth and governed on the one hand by imitating and replicating the role of the heavenly king and, on the other hand, by obedient submission to divine authority. This duality of the emperor's divine mandate to be both the image and the servant of God remained fundamental to the Byzantine conception of monarchy, allowing Byzantine writers to emphasize the emperor's divine right or his subordinate responsibility as the occasion and their position dictated. The emperors, their officials, and their publicists naturally emphasized their absolute power, while their rare critics, who were usually churchmen, insisted on their moral responsibility. In the medieval west, under the powerful influence of St. Augustine, this ecclesiastical critique would lead to the idea that the Church was the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.²² In the east, however, there was much less question of the Church superseding the empire or subordinating the emperor. Moreover, Byzantium was slow to define the divine mandate of its monarchy in terms of biblical precedent and Christian cosmology. Eusebios compared Constantine to Moses, but his theory of divine kingship was Hellenistic rather than Judaic in inspiration, and the same was true of the two main theorists of the next two centuries, Synesios of Cyrene and Agapetos the Deacon. The former's polite critique of Arkadios (395–408)²³ and the latter's discreet advice to Justinian (527–565)²⁴ were based on the maxim, derived from Isocrates, that the man who rules others must be able to discipline his passions and servants in accordance with the divine ideal. Although emperors, especially Justinian,

²¹ Eusebios, *Life of Constantine* and *In Praise of Constantine*; Alexander 1962. For a classic statement of the Eusebian model, see Nicol 1988.

²² Markus 1988. ²³ Synesios, *On Kingship*.

²⁴ Agapetos the Deacon, *Advice to the Emperor*; see P. Bell 2009: 99–122.

increasingly adopted an aura of Christian sanctity, they continued to style their autocracy according to Roman models, while educated senators and bureaucrats reacted to imperial autocracy by cultivating nostalgia for the vanishing institutions of ancient civic autonomy: the Neoplatonic *Dialogue on Political Science*, written under Justinian, advocates a mixed constitution and the rule of a philosopher king.²⁵

Biblical models of kingship came more sharply into focus with eschatological speculation, in the sixth and seventh centuries, about the fate of the empire and its role in God's plan.²⁶ As apocalyptic signs and significant cosmic dates raised expectations of the end of the world and Christ's Second Coming, the Christian empire swung between the hope of total cosmic victory and the fear of total annihilation at the hands of its barbarian enemies, and sought to sacralize its identity in the scheme of biblical prophecy. The Roman empire was traditionally identified with the fourth and last of the great gentile empires that had oppressed the Jews and suppressed the Kingdom of Israel.²⁷ However, toward the end of Justinian's reign, the author of a fundamentalist treatise on Christian cosmology expressed the idea that the Christian Roman empire was a different political entity from its pre-Constantinian predecessor and should be identified not with the transitory fourth monarchy of Daniel's prophecy, but with the everlasting Messianic kingdom that would supersede the succession of secular regimes.²⁸ This idea was never formally adopted in imperial ideology, but religious commentators kept it alive, particularly as an argument against Jewish Messianism,²⁹ and it was clearly consonant with the blatantly sacral tone that characterized many high-profile ideological statements and policy innovations over the following centuries. The usurpers Phokas and Herakleios legitimized their positions by having themselves crowned by the patriarch in church, a ritual that became a permanent fixture.³⁰ To an unprecedented extent, Herakleios' publicity compared him with Old Testament heroes and advertised his war against Sasanian Persia as a holy war.³¹ In the aftermath of his final victory, he formally styled himself as *basileus* in a piece of legislation, his Novel IV of 629, thus officially adopting for the Roman emperor the title that had designated not only the Persian king, but also, more importantly, the kings of Israel and the kingship of Christ.³² Around the same time, he triumphantly restored the relic of Christ's Cross that the Persians had deported from Jerusalem, thus becoming the first and only Byzantine male ruler to

²⁵ *Dialogue on Political Science*; see P. Bell 2009: 123–188.

²⁶ Magdalino 1993b: 4–20; 2008: 121–128. ²⁷ van Bekkum 2008.

²⁸ Kosmas, *Christian Topography* 387–391; MacCormack 1982.

²⁹ Magdalino and Nelson 2010: 14, 28. ³⁰ Dagron 2003: 70–71.

³¹ Whitby 1994; Magdalino and Nelson 2010: 16–17; Rapp 2010: 194–196.

³² Herakleios, *Novels* 84; Humphreys 2015: 30–33.

set foot in the Holy City. Two to four years later he set another precedent by ordering the conversion of the Jews, whose own Messianic expectations had been revived by the clash of empires.³³

The Arab conquests, which within twelve years of Herakleios' victory over Persia radically redrew the map of the Middle East at the expense of both empires, did nothing to deflate and everything to encourage the Roman monarchy's assumption of biblical, sacral identity. The Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and now Islam – remained on apocalyptic alert, and Byzantine imperialism found a new sense of mission in the struggle to defend the Chosen People of the New Israel and their capital city, the God-guarded New Rome and New Jerusalem, against the mighty hordes of the ungodly, whose very victories confirmed the elect status of the Christian nation that God was chastising, like ancient Israel, for its sins.

The Byzantine monarchy's ideological response to the seventh-century crisis – and the internal power struggles that it generated – was thus, on the one hand, an ever more uncompromising assertion of imperial autocracy and, on the other hand, an ever more explicit acknowledgment of imperial dependence on and conformity to the theocracy of Christ. The show trials of pope Martin I and Maximos the Confessor under Constans II (641–668) were high points in the stark imposition of imperial authority, with Maximos being faulted for denying that the emperor was both *basileus* and *hiereus*, emperor and priest.³⁴ The regime of the last Herakleian emperor, Justinian II (685–695, 705–711), is portrayed by a hostile witness as a showcase of arrogant and ostentatious tyranny against the aristocracy and the Church.³⁵ Yet the documents from the Church Councils convened in the palace by Justinian II and his father, Constantine IV (668–685), portray the image of an emperor working in faithful obedience to Christ and in cordial collaboration with the bishops over whom he presides.³⁶ At the same time, the Herakleian emperors made a point of including the senate and people in their formal assertion of secular power.³⁷

The Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–681) referred to Christ as “co-reigning” with Constantine IV,³⁸ thus picking up the concept of “co-sovereignty” (*symbasileia*) used by a contemporary writer who identified the Christian Roman empire as Daniel's Messianic “fifth

³³ Magdalino 2014: 234–242.

³⁴ *Trial of Maximos Confessor* 56–57; Brandes 1998; Booth 2013: 278–328; see Chapter 24.

³⁵ The source for the narratives of Nikephoros, *Short History* 92–113, and Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* 361–381 (Mango and Scott 1997: 504–529) has been identified as the lost history of Traianos *patrikius*, covering the period 629–720: Treadgold 2011.

³⁶ *Sixth Ecumenical Council* and *Quinisext Council*; Nedungatt and Featherstone 1995; Humphreys 2015: 37–80. On the palace venue and its significance, see Magdalino 2010: 60–62.

³⁷ Brandes 1998: 211–212; Magdalino 2015c. ³⁸ *Sixth Ecumenical Council* 120, 816, 854.

monarchy,” but also echoing the prophecy of Revelation that the saints would reign together with Christ in his millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:1–7).³⁹ The Quinisext Council of 691–692, advertised as the sequel to its predecessor, opened with an address to Justinian II in which the Church praises the emperor for his initiative in prompting the episcopate to enact a program of long-overdue moral and disciplinary reform.⁴⁰ In sophisticated rhetoric, seasoned with carefully chosen biblical quotations and no doubt crafted by an imperial secretary, the assembled bishops acknowledge the emperor’s divine zeal in rousing them to action, and laud his leadership in a series of metaphors, exempla, and allusions blended from Christian and classical thought. Christ, the commander of the cosmic ship, has appointed him helmsman and captain; he is like Phineas in his righteous zeal; and he imitates Christ the Good Shepherd in his care for his flock. The Divine Wisdom of Christ has filled him with the Holy Spirit and made him the eye of the universe; she has entrusted her Church to him (an allusion to Hagia Sophia) and taught him to study her law day and night. As the divinely guided steersman of humanity, he navigates to save his subjects from the winds of evil, which are both external enemies and unclean, inner demons – just as the barbarians who tear them apart equate, as “sufferings” (*pathe*), with the passions that drive them to sin. Thus the pastor’s pious concern for the spiritual salvation of the Church’s flock is identified with the captain’s material defense of the ship of state, and the emperor, who combines both roles, is mandated by Divine Wisdom to apply the law in both areas.

The opening address of the Quinisext Council is in effect a justification of autocracy by theocracy. The same ideal of kingship was stated, in concise visual terms, by the innovatory gold coinage that Justinian II introduced around the same time.⁴¹ The emperor transferred his own portrait from its traditional place on the obverse (the “front”) to the reverse, replacing it with a bust portrait icon of Christ. The icon of Christ was accompanied by the inscription “Jesus Christ King of Kings,” a biblical reference, while the legend beside the emperor’s portrait designated him as the servant of Christ. It is hard to imagine a clearer statement of the “co-sovereignty” with Christ that now formed the basis of Byzantine imperial legitimation, nor of the extent to which the image of Christ had become a symbol of worldly monarchical power since Justin II (565–578) had adopted it to decorate the apex of the main palace throne room, the Chrysotriklinos.⁴²

³⁹ Anastasios of Sinai, *Against the Jews*, col. 1212 (cf. Thümmel 1992: 253–268); Magdalino 2003a: 249–253.

⁴⁰ Humphreys 2015: 46–57; Wagschal 2015: 108–112. ⁴¹ Breckenridge 1959.

⁴² Cameron 1979: 16–17.

The bad reputation left by Justinian II ensured that there was no immediate follow-up to his particular theocratic projection of *basileia*, which may indeed have contributed to the reaction against religious icons in the next generation. However, the reforms of the Quinisext Council were permanently adopted by the Byzantine Church, the icon of Christ (endorsed in canon 82) eventually returned as a symbol of imperial power, and the theme of imperial wisdom was picked up in the propaganda of later emperors. Moreover, the principle behind the Council, that the emperor had a duty to impose religious and moral reform in order to gain divine favor and ensure military success against the empire's enemies, was not discredited by the failures of Justinian II, but inspired the distinctive policy and ideology of the Isaurian dynasty that came to power in 717, just as the Arabs were making their last and greatest attempt to take Constantinople.⁴³

The spectacular failure of the Arab siege of 717–718 did not remove the Islamic threat, and gave no grounds for complacency about the future of the Christian empire in relation to Islam and Judaism, the latter still a powerful intellectual presence. If anything, it increased the pressure on the empire to put its house in order and vindicate its claim to Messianic monopoly. It was clearly with a sense of previous reforms having failed to do the trick that the new emperor, Leo III, and his son Constantine V insisted on a more fundamentalist return to the basics of Christian Roman culture, particularly reverence for the Cross as a symbol of imperial victory, as opposed to the portrait of Christ,⁴⁴ and the primacy of Law, both Roman law and the Law of Moses, including notably the Second Commandment against the worship of idols. The result was the implementation of Iconoclasm and the publication of a revised Roman law code, the *Ecloga*, followed by an appendix and several supplements.⁴⁵

The preface to the *Ecloga* gives some insight into the ideal of *basileia* held by Leo III and Constantine V.⁴⁶ Underlining the importance of law as God's great gift to mankind to aid the choice between right and wrong, the emperors state that it is through the exercise of justice that they must repay God for raising them to power, since he has commanded them, like St. Peter, to shepherd his faithful flock.

Thus will we be crowned by his almighty hand with victories against our enemies, a crown more precious and sumptuous than the diadem we wear, and our realm will be established in peace and our state in stability. So, occupied with these concerns and sleeplessly applying our mind to the search for what is both pleasing to God and in the public interest, we have preferred Justice over all earthly things,

⁴³ For the historical background, see Auzépy 2007. ⁴⁴ Moorhead 1985.

⁴⁵ Humphreys 2015: 81–232. ⁴⁶ Leo III and Konstantinos V, *Ecloga* 160–167.

since it procures access to the things of heaven and is sharper than any sword against our enemies through the strength of Him whom it serves.⁴⁷

This has led the emperors to publish the present concise revision of past legislation together with their own new laws. They urge imperial judges to apply these “pious laws” with the inventive discretion of Solomon.

For in these [laws] we strive to please God who has entrusted us with the sceptre of *basileia*, with these weapons we purpose to combat the enemy vigorously by God’s strength. In these things do we believe that the flock bearing Christ’s emblem, who have been made subject to our gentleness by God’s power, will increase and progress for the good; by these things do we hope to restore the ancient jurisdiction of the state.⁴⁸

Like the opening address of the Quinisext Council, the preface to the *Ecloga* is a justification of autocracy by theocracy, and it contains some distinct and probably deliberate echoes of the earlier manifesto: the image of the emperor as shepherd with the God-given duty to reform the moral state of his flock so as to ensure their salvation in the next life and his victory against their enemies. Yet the differences are no less obvious: the *Ecloga* proposes a reformation not of canon law but of the secular legal system, which it nevertheless sacralizes with the stamp of imperial piety. Moreover, the *Ecloga* proposes not only to complete the work of earlier legislators, but also to return to an ideal past. It is this insistence on authentic tradition that distinguishes the monarchical ideal of the Isaurian emperors. By their insistence on the primacy of law and the observance of the Mosaic commandment against idolatry, they were staking their claim to the Messianic inheritance that Christianity disputed with Judaism and Islam, and tending toward a literal identification of the Christian Empire as the New Israel. On the other hand, their imitation of Old Testament kingship went no further, and in sacralizing the state they did not sacrifice its secular Roman constitution, any more than their seventh-century predecessors.⁴⁹ Constantine V was notorious for his attachment to the traditional secular rituals of circus games, palace festivities, and public victory parades. If he consciously imitated any model monarch, this was not David or Solomon, but Constantine the Great, whom he resembled in his reorganization of the army, his regeneration of Constantinople, and his calling of a self-styled Ecumenical Council to abolish icons.⁵⁰

The reaction against Iconoclasm brought with it a denunciation of the Iconoclast rulers, both the eighth-century Isaurians and the three emperors who reimposed Iconoclasm from 815 to 842.⁵¹ They were criticized for their

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 162. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 166. ⁴⁹ Magdalino 2015c. ⁵⁰ Magdalino 2007: 15–23.

⁵¹ Evidence and bibliography in Brubaker and Haldon 2001 and 2011.

profane lifestyle, their Judaizing, their lack of culture, and their tyrannical treatment of the Church. Their own ideological statements, with the exception of the *Ecloge* and some theological writings that were excerpted for the purposes of refutation, were systematically eliminated under the regimes that restored and perpetuated the veneration of icons. Yet the political ideology of the post-Iconoclastic regimes was not that different in principle. It continued to sacralize the state, prioritized the law and legal reform, and placed emphasis on authentic, ancient tradition. It naturally distanced itself from the specific achievements of the Iconoclast emperors, but the most striking difference is of quantity rather than quality: the political culture of the post-Iconoclastic period is simply so much better documented, in theory and in practice.

The period from c. 860 to c. 995 saw a profusion of art and literature exalting the imperial image, describing the ideal monarch, and idealizing the procedures of the monarchical system. This literature was produced by or on behalf of closely connected persons in the highest positions of authority. It can be explained by three interrelated factors: an ongoing revival of classical learning that had begun around the year 800; an impetus to consolidate the Triumph of Orthodoxy by extending it beyond the Church to the normalization of political traditions and institutions; and the need of the “Macedonian” dynasty to legitimate its rather controversial regime, whose founder, Basil I (867–886), had taken power by the murder of his predecessor, Michael III (842–867), and whose second ruler, Basil’s son Leo VI (886–912), had produced his son and heir, Constantine VII (912–959), by a scandalous fourth marriage that divided the Church for fifteen years.⁵²

The literature divides neatly into three phases corresponding to the first three generations of the Macedonian dynasty, and thus to the patronage of the cultural phenomenon known as the “Macedonian Renaissance.”⁵³ The first phase was dominated by the patriarch Photios, who had already been the ideological spokesman for Michael III and returned to office under Basil I largely thanks to his talents in sacralizing the image and scripting the program of the uneducated, upstart usurper.⁵⁴ Leo VI, however, who was educated by Photios, mainly wrote his own script as legislator, preacher, and military theorist, although the praise he received from intellectual courtiers also enhanced his image as the “wise” emperor par excellence.⁵⁵ A gap of over thirty years separates Leo’s “wisdom” from its resumption by Constantine VII, whose sponsorship of various cultural

⁵² Fourth marriage: Oikonomides 1976. ⁵³ In general, see Magdalino 2013.

⁵⁴ Signes Codoñer and Andrés Santos 2007: 3–52; Prieto Domínguez 2014: 292–302.

⁵⁵ Tougher 1997: 110–132.

projects, some of which continued after his death, inaugurated the third and last phase of the “Macedonian Renaissance.”

In terms of political ideology, the three phases may be summarized as follows. In the first phase Photios, apart from writing up the credentials of Basil I, set out the qualities of the ideal monarch in his letter of admonition and advice to the newly converted king of Bulgaria,⁵⁶ and in three other works that are generally attributed to him by scholars: the opening chapters of Basil I’s law code, the *Eisagoge*,⁵⁷ and the two “mirrors of princes” that Basil offered for the instruction and edification of his successor.⁵⁸ In the second phase, Leo VI, apart from projecting his wisdom and his autocracy in his homilies and law books, sought to restore the laws, the army, and aspects of palace ceremonial to their original state of order.⁵⁹ Finally, Constantine VII extended this program of ordering to other areas of government and cultural life, though with less emphasis on “cleansing” reform than on the “encyclopedic” collection of documentation and precedents; he paid particular attention to historiography, both as a source of moral and political exempla, and as a tool of dynastic propaganda, which he used to portray his grandfather, Basil I, as the ideal emperor.⁶⁰ The biography of Basil that he authorized presents, in historical form, the most comprehensive statement of imperial ideology to be found in a single Byzantine text.⁶¹

In this chapter, there is room only to evoke how the cultural investment and dynastic propaganda of the Macedonian emperors enriched and refined the Byzantine conception of *basileia*. First, the justification of autocracy by theocracy reached unprecedented levels and channels of expression, as the emperors and their publicists worked hard to emphasize their special relationship with God. Not only did they use all the available media to advertise their great piety and their providential elevation to power, but they also invested themselves with sacred and sacral roles. Basil I claimed the special protection of the Prophet Elijah and the Archangel Gabriel, and, with some help from Photios, used the circumstances of his career to reinvent himself as a reincarnation of King David.⁶² The example of David’s son Solomon was surely the main inspiration for the extraordinary profile adopted by Basil’s son Leo VI, who was officially designated “the Wise” and who officiated as lawgiver, preacher, and chief celebrant in the ceremonial inauguration of new churches.⁶³ According to an admittedly hostile source, Leo believed himself to be the intercessor

⁵⁶ Photios, *Letter 1* (pp. 2–39); White and Berrigan 1982.

⁵⁷ *Eisagoge* 240–242; Signes Codoñer and Andrés Santos 2007: 288–290.

⁵⁸ Basil I, *Advisory*, chs. I–II; see Markopoulos 1998. ⁵⁹ Magdalino 1997b.

⁶⁰ Magdalino 2014: 190–193, 197–209. ⁶¹ *Life of Basil I*.

⁶² Dagron 2003: 199–200; Brubaker 1999: 185–193; Magdalino and Nelson 2010: 22–25.

⁶³ Tougher 1994; 1997: 110–132; Markopoulos 1998.

between his people and God.⁶⁴ Constantine VII, though adopting a lower profile, operated on much the same assumption, exhorting his troops on God's behalf to victory against the infidel,⁶⁵ and inviting the protection of heavenly powers by bringing their earthly relics to Constantinople.⁶⁶ The literature celebrating these transfers emphasizes the intimacy that they established between the emperor and the holy persons in question: St. John the Baptist, St. Gregory of Nazianzos, and, most importantly, Christ himself, whose presence was reinforced by the arrival of the Mandylion, the cloth on which Christ was said to have imprinted an image of his face which he sent to king Abgar of Edessa.⁶⁷ The ideological point is made most eloquently in a contemporary icon where Abgar is depicted receiving the Mandylion: he wears Byzantine imperial costume and has the face of Constantine VII.⁶⁸ We are reminded, once more, of that other tenth-century "poster" where political theory was expressed in pictorial language: it is appropriate to recall the vestibule mosaic of Hagia Sophia together with the icon of Abgar when moving on to consider another theme of the Macedonian political culture. The pictures not only depict the earthly *basileia* in close relationship to the sovereignty of Christ, but they do so by personifying the *basileia* in iconic monarchs from the past. Abgar was the first monarch to worship Christ and to worship him in the most Orthodox way possible, through the medium of an icon not made with human hands. Constantine and Justinian were the iconic founding fathers of the Christian Roman empire, who symbolized its past greatness, the *translatio imperii* (transfer of imperial power) from Rome to Constantinople, and the divinely sanctioned legitimacy of their successors. The vestibule mosaic was only one of many means by which the Macedonians sought to connect with the glorious imperial past, and in particular with Constantine the Great, who had acquired mythical proportions in popular imagination.⁶⁹ They restored ancient churches, palace buildings, and public monuments, they recorded and may even have revived ancient ceremonial procedures,⁷⁰ and they revived some aspects of late antique secular court culture, notably the collection and display of profane and pagan works of art.⁷¹ They provided their dynasty with an ancient genealogy that included Constantine the Great, Alexander the Great, and the Arsacid kings of Armenia.⁷² Most importantly, they reissued, recodified and added to the corpus of Roman

⁶⁴ *Life of Niketas David* 124–125. ⁶⁵ McGeer 2003; Markopoulos 2012. ⁶⁶ Flusin 2000.

⁶⁷ Flusin 2001: 48–54; Guscini 2009.

⁶⁸ Cutler and Spieser 1996: 157–160; Byzantine and Christian Museum 2002: 105–106 (G. Galavaris).

⁶⁹ Brubaker 1994; Magdalino 1999. ⁷⁰ Featherstone 2013. ⁷¹ Magdalino 2016.

⁷² Markopoulos 1994.

law in an effort to link up with the legacy of Justinian and to outperform the legalism and traditionalism of the Iconoclast emperors.⁷³

The relationship of the emperor to the law is another distinctive feature of the political culture of the “Macedonian Renaissance.” The Macedonian emperors produced a huge body of legislation, ranging from individual rulings and concise manuals to a new revised Greek edition of the entire Justinianic Corpus in the sixty books of the *Basilika*. The chronology of these enactments, which underwent much revision and interpolation, remains controversial. However, there is general agreement that the process initially fulfilled the need to replace the Isaurian *Ecloga* with a more politically correct manual of law, and that its first stage was strongly influenced by Photios, who is regarded as the author of the *Introduction to the Law (Eisagoge)* issued in the name of Basil I.⁷⁴

The opening sections of the *Eisagoge* are the closest thing that we possess to a written, programmatic statement of the Byzantine constitution. The preface is a hymn to Law, and goes even further than the *Ecloga* in exalting it as the essential quality of the divine monarchy. “For law has been appointed by God to rule over men as they strip off for contest in the arena of free choice, and indeed to reign over the righteous cohorts. Thus, as we have learned, *law has always been the king even of kings*, and not just any kings, but those who are highly commemorated and praised for orthodoxy and justice.”⁷⁵ The *Eisagoge* goes on to define, in its first three chapters, the functions of the law, the emperor, and the patriarch respectively.⁷⁶ The main reason for attributing the work to Photios is the relative importance accorded to the emperor, defined merely as a “law-abiding supervision,” and the patriarch, who is designated, in what we might expect to be the emperor’s role, as “the living and animate image of Christ.” The chapter on the emperor emphasizes his duties rather than his powers. Thus he must be a benefactor “outstanding in orthodoxy and piety . . . He should interpret the legislation of the ancients and decide by analogy on matters not covered by the law,” but “in the interpretation of the laws he should pay attention to the custom of the city, and what has been introduced against the rules (*kanonas*) should not be admitted as an example.” On the other hand, the chapter on the patriarch insists on the rights pertaining to the office, including the right to “speak freely and without shame in the emperor’s presence on behalf of truth and the vindication of [Orthodox] dogma,” and the rights of the see of Constantinople to hear appeals from, and consecrate churches in, the territories of other patriarchal jurisdictions.

⁷³ Schminck 1986; Fögen 1998; Signes Codoñer and Andrés Santos 2007; Magdalino 1999; 2011b: 149; Humphreys 2015: 244–248.

⁷⁴ *Eisagoge*; Signes Codoñer and Andrés Santos 2007; preface ed. and tr. Schminck 1986: 4–11.

⁷⁵ Schminck 1986: 6 (my emphasis). ⁷⁶ *Eisagoge* 240–243.

It is not surprising that this ecclesiastically slanted constitutionalism did not resonate in subsequent Macedonian legislation, which was largely the work of the autocratic Leo VI. It is clear from the emperor's *Novels* ("new laws"), which he issued after the model of Justinian, that, following Hellenistic political thought, Leo VI considered himself a "living law" rather than a "law-abiding supervision," and he did not stand in awe of ancient law as a sovereign or sacred authority, because he was only too conscious that previous legislators, especially the great Justinian, had done a less than perfect job.⁷⁷ Yet Leo took more than he rejected from the manifesto of the *Eisagoge*. He shared its conception of law as a vital, all-embracing principle, in which canon law and unwritten custom had a part. He also applied the notion of law to areas of government beyond the administration of justice, in which he was followed, in the next generation, by Constantine VII. Like the treatises on strategy and court protocol authorized by Leo VI, Constantine's famous "encyclopedias" on provincial administration, relations with foreign powers, and court ceremonial, which are core source material for our knowledge of the imperial system, can aptly be described as works of public law.⁷⁸ As such they take their cue from the opening chapters of the *Eisagoge*.

Law is paired with order in a common English expression, and they were closely associated in middle Byzantine political ideology too, beginning with the preface to the *Eisagoge*: "For all things have from the beginning been effected and formed by law, and being fittingly endowed with good order (*eutaxia*), as if designed and blueprinted by some ruler or compass, they are gathered and assembled harmoniously in establishing the decorum of one world." "Order" (*taxis*), "good order" (*eutaxia*), "harmony" (*harmonia*), and "world decorum" (*kosmos*) are keywords that recur throughout the extended, non-juridical, public legislation of Leo VI and Constantine VII, including their prescriptive books on military strategy, imperial expeditions, guild regulations, history, and, most fundamentally, court ceremonial, which was the showcase of law and order in action. Order has rightly been seen as the quintessence of the imperial ideal, a distinctive brew of Roman law, constitutionalism, and military triumphalism, patristic theology, Hellenistic sophism, Neoplatonic philosophy, monastic discipline, and Judeo-Christian Messianism.⁷⁹ These ingredients had long coexisted in slow fermentation, but it was the court culture of the Macedonian dynasty that blended and distilled them to perfection.

The display of good order in the court culture of the "Macedonian Renaissance" masked serious internal fissures and external weaknesses that are apparent from the less official historiography of the period. However,

⁷⁷ Leo VI, *Novels*, preface, and *Novel* 1, 40–47. ⁷⁸ Magdalino 1997b.

⁷⁹ Ahrweiler 1975; Magdalino 2011b: 152–154.

reality caught up with appearance a generation later, and the efforts of Leo VI and Constantine VII to put the imperial house in good order paid off in the reign and the person of Constantine's grandson Basil II (976–1025).⁸⁰ Basil's remote predecessors had ruled greater territories and managed larger resources, but in terms of the degree of power he wielded at home and abroad, Basil was possibly the most effective emperor who sat on the Byzantine throne; he was certainly second to none in his control of the Church, domination of the aristocracy, successful leadership of the army, suppression of opposition, acquisition of territory, and management of financial resources. At least that is how it appears from the three sources that portray him as an icon of militaristic, imperial absolutism. Dating from his reign were his *Novel of 996* against the "powerful,"⁸¹ and the miniature that illustrates the Psalter he commissioned, depicting him in full battledress, crowned by the hand of God, and armed by the soldier saints, with vanquished opponents groveling at his feet.⁸² Dating from at least three decades after his death is the eloquent biographical sketch that opens the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos.⁸³

With Basil II, we reach the high-water mark of the middle Byzantine ideal of *basileia*, and with the *Chronographia* we enter a new phase in the intellectual perception of monarchy in Byzantium. The idealization of imperial power did not abate in the eleventh and twelfth centuries – or even thereafter.⁸⁴ Indeed, the literature idealizing individual emperors expanded exponentially, and grew ever more extravagant in its praise of the ruler's divine attributes, omnicompetence, and infallibility.⁸⁵ But the literature of praise was rhetoric, and rhetoric was the art of finding the words appropriate to the occasion, which was invariably one of deferring to authority.⁸⁶ Rhetoric was also "double-tongued," which meant that it could present both sides of a case with equal facility, and it could say one thing and mean another. The rhetorical idealization of imperial power was thus a part of the same inventive sophistication that led to the growth of creative literary authorship in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁸⁷ Moreover, being part of an education in the language and values of classical antiquity, the study of rhetoric – which included a large dose of philosophy – acquainted its students with the non-monarchical constitutions and institutions of the ancient world, all the more so since rhetoric had originated as the professional medium of public discourse in the ancient city-state. The textbooks and model orations of the Second Sophistic, from

⁸⁰ Holmes 2005. ⁸¹ Basil II, *Novel of 996*.

⁸² Cutler and Spieser 1996: 319, 321; Stephenson 2003: 91–96. ⁸³ Psellos, *Chronographia*, book 1.

⁸⁴ Angelov 2007. ⁸⁵ Magdalino 1993a: 413–488.

⁸⁶ See Bourbouhakis 2010 and Whitby 2010 for useful introductions to Byzantine rhetorical practice; for rhetoric as a source and medium of political thought, Angelov 2007: 18–22.

⁸⁷ Roilos 2005; Papaioannou 2013.

which the Byzantines learned their rhetorical theory and practice, reflected the milieu of the self-governing Greek *polis* of the Roman empire in the second century CE; they spoke the language of a civic mentality within an imperial framework, of *basileia* refracted through the values and structures of *politeia*.⁸⁸

There was thus a potential dissonance between the theocratic, autocratic ideal of *basileia*, and the values of civil society underpinning the medium in which that ideal was celebrated. This dissonance had been latent since the age of Justinian, but it broke out again in the eleventh century, at a time when rhetoric and law were becoming more professionalized and more academic, in a conscious return to their ancient roots.⁸⁹ The dissonant voices are to be heard in two works of history writing: the *Chronographia* of Psellos and the *History* of Michael Attaleiates.

The imperial biographies of the *Chronographia* are for the most part nuanced character studies of the psychology of power with barely a hint of religious moralizing. Introducing his long account of the reign of Constantine IX, Psellos admits the discrepancy between the official speeches of praise he had delivered during the emperor's lifetime and the objective historical portrait he is now about to provide.⁹⁰ He writes of *basileia* in terms of *politeia*, literally describing the state as a body politic. While he largely omits the details of government from his narrative, his critique of imperial policies articulates the principles of imperial government in several passages that add up to a mini-treatise on political thought. Criticizing the indiscriminate expenditure and promotions made by Constantine IX, he introduces a new approach to *taxis*, by focusing on the logistical reality that lay behind the ceremonial ordering of hierarchy of the imperial court. "Now, two things sustain the hegemony of the Romans, I mean honors and money, to which one might add a third, the wise control of the other two and careful thought in awarding them." Constantine, however, emptied the treasury and debased court dignities by indiscriminate promotions. "Although there is an order of honor in civil society, and an invariable limit to promotion, he confused the former and abolished the latter, so that he all but made the entire vagrant rabble of the marketplace members of the Senate."⁹¹

Returning to the subject in connection with one particular appointment, Psellos writes:

In well-governed cities, there are registers of both the aristocracy and nobility and of the common citizens, for the civilian classes as well as the ranks of the military; this was the political system of the Athenians, and of as many cities as emulated

⁸⁸ The implications have been studied for the late Byzantine period by Gaul 2011. For the meaning of *politeia*, see Kaldellis 2015b.

⁸⁹ For law, see Magdalino 1985. ⁹⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.22–28, 6.161–162. ⁹¹ *Ibid.* 6.29.

their form of democracy. Among us, however, this excellent practice has been discarded and discredited, and nobility counts for nothing. This is an ancient legacy, since it was Romulus who began the confusion by which the senate has become corrupted and anyone who wishes can be made a citizen.⁹²

The political failure of Michael VI (1056–1057) is introduced with a further general comment on the mismanagement of the system: “recent emperors” have shown undue favor to the “civilian element” in society. “Although their security rests on three foundations, the popular crowd, the senatorial order, and the armed forces, they care next to nothing for the third, while they immediately award the favors of power to the other two.”⁹³ Elsewhere, Psellos uses elaborate medical metaphors to describe the progressive deterioration of the state since the time of Basil II, and the violent remedial “surgery” applied by Isaac I.⁹⁴

On first reading, Psellos seems to be merely expressing a conservative defense of the imperial status quo in the face of social change. On rereading, it becomes clear that he is also redefining the monarchy in the secular, constitutional terms of ancient political philosophy; he is describing *basileia* as a function of *politeia*, and demystifying the mystique of imperial “good order” that Constantine VII had attempted to codify a century earlier. The positive evocation of ancient Athenian democracy alerts us to the fact that something rather unconventional is being proposed. Psellos is no democrat, but he advocates a monarchy informed and justified by constitutional theory, in effect a “royal science” (*basilike episteme*) that is the “science of civilian affairs” (*politike episteme*) in its highest form.⁹⁵

The *History* of Attaleiates might seem, at first glance, to be an even more conservative and religious reaction to the causes of the major crisis that the empire was going through around the year 1080, when he was writing. Yet Attaleiates also conveys a sense that the *basileia* of the Romans might have done better if it had remained true to its origins in the republican world of antiquity.⁹⁶ Only for him, as a professional and academic lawyer, the ancient *politeia* of reference is not Athens but Rome, and he is more positive than Psellos about the people of Constantinople and their role in effecting regime change as well as social change. In praising the emperor under whom he wrote, Nikephoros III Botaneiates, Attaleiates dwells fondly on the “democratic moment” when a popular assembly transferred power to Nikephoros from Michael VII and appointed an interim government.⁹⁷

The crisis of the empire in the late eleventh century provoked other challenges to the way it was being ruled. The anonymous author known as

⁹² *Ibid.* 6.134. ⁹³ *Ibid.* 7.1. ⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 7.51–62. ⁹⁵ Angelov 2012: 34–39; O’Meara 2012b.

⁹⁶ Attaleiates, *History* 149–152; Magdalino 1983: 332. ⁹⁷ Attaleiates, *History* 207–210.

Kekaumenos offered polite but critical advice to the emperor Michael VII (1071–1078), reproving him for never leaving Constantinople and, in an echo of Psellos' critique of Constantine IX, for mismanaging the system of rewards and honors to the advantage of barbarian immigrants.⁹⁸ The emperor who eventually ended the crisis after coming to power through another coup d'état in 1081, Alexios I Komnenos, was no less criticized, on account of the very measures he imposed in order to stabilize his regime: oppressive taxation, the quasi-privatization of state resources for the benefit of his extended family, and the restructuring of the court hierarchy in a way that reserved the top rewards and honors to a clique of imperial relatives and favorites.⁹⁹ The beginning of his reign was marked, moreover, by two conspicuous violations of tradition. He did not take power by the invitation of the senate and people of Constantinople, but took the city by force, with his troops committing several acts of violence against civilians.¹⁰⁰ A few months later, he ordered the confiscation of church valuables to pay for his war against Robert Guiscard.¹⁰¹ To compensate for all this abuse of power, Alexios made a great show of piety, and adopted a high profile as the defender of Orthodoxy, who was more zealous than the clergy in saving the Church from heresy and disunity.¹⁰² In this he set a pattern that was followed by his grandson Manuel I (1143–1180).¹⁰³ At the same time, Alexios and his successors were under enormous pressure to justify their tenure of power by reversing the defeats and invasions that the empire had suffered from its neighboring barbarians; this meant a new emphasis on the emperor's personal leadership of his armies in the field.

The consolidation of the Komnenian dynasty thus had a polarizing effect upon the idea and ideal of monarchy. On the one hand, the simultaneous sacralization and militarization of the emperor's image was taken to new extremes. Alexios' daughter, Anna Komnene, celebrated him in an epic biography, the *Alexiad*, as both the thirteenth Apostle and a Homeric hero.¹⁰⁴ The Church invented, from the language of monastic administration, the title of *epistemonarches* to justify Manuel's highly publicized arbitration in religious affairs,¹⁰⁵ and his publicity showed no inhibition in celebrating him as the image and imitator of Christ.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the civilian, constitutional ideology awakened by Psellos and

⁹⁸ Kekaumenos, *Advice to the Emperor* 95–97, 103–104.

⁹⁹ John Zonaras, *Historical Summary* 732–733, 737–738, 766–767; John Oxeites, *Orations to Alexios Komnenos* 26–35; see Magdalino 1983; 329–330; 1993; 181–190.

¹⁰⁰ Zonaras, *Historical Summary* 728–730; Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 3.10.4.

¹⁰¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 5.2; Angold 1995: 46–48. ¹⁰² Magdalino 1996; Rigo 2009.

¹⁰³ Angold 1995: 77–115; Bucossi 2009a; 2009b. ¹⁰⁴ Macrides 2000: 66–69; Buckley 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Magdalino 1993a: 280–281, 284–285; 2000: 31–33; Angold 1995: 99–103.

¹⁰⁶ Magdalino 1993a: 480–488. For the comparison of Manuel with Christ, see also Ševčenko 2010 and Antonopoulou 2013.

Attaleiates did not go away but was stimulated by the excesses of the regime. The opposition to Manuel was accused of wanting to replace him with an emperor who would rule “as if in a democracy.”¹⁰⁷ Theophylact, a student of Psellos who later became archbishop of Ohrid, cannot have ignored the Komnenian seizure of power when he reflected, only four years later, on the difference between kingship and tyranny, and noted that the tyrant seizes power by violence and bloodshed, while the lawful monarch takes office “by the favor of the multitude and the considered and well-disposed consent of the people.”¹⁰⁸ Some forty years later, commenting on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Eustratios of Nicaea emphasized the duty of the “statesman” (*politikos*) to apply the Aristotelian principle of distributive justice, so as to ensure that every citizen received his due reward in proportion to his merit.¹⁰⁹ Eustratios may have recalled the alterations to the system of rewards and honors that Psellos and Kekaumenos had criticized in the eleventh century, and he could not have been unaware of the controversy and resentment that Alexios had aroused by his more radical restructuring of the court hierarchy. Revealingly, Anna Komnene, under whose patronage Eustratios was writing, made a point of extolling the new court titles created by Alexios as inventions of royal science:

For if one were to elevate kingship (*basileia*) to the status of a science and supreme philosophy, as being the art of arts and science of sciences, he would surely admire my father for being as it were a scientist and architect who innovates both the matters and the names pertaining to royal government.¹¹⁰

By this comment, Anna – who had read Psellos – both asserted that her father had passed the test of rulership that the eleventh-century emperors had failed, and deflected a recent attempt to claim “royal science” for Alexios’ successors John II and Manuel I.¹¹¹ She also obliquely countered the suggestion that Alexios had violated the principle of distributive justice.

However, Anna’s oblique response was no match for the frontal attack on the Komnenian system of government that was mounted – whether before or after the *Alexiad* is not clear – in the world history of the ex-judge John Zonaras. Zonaras’ critique was formidable because it was based not only on Aristotelian philosophy but also on Roman history, and because it was directed not exclusively against the Komnenoi, but against all recent emperors, beginning with Basil II, who had ruled unconstitutionally.¹¹² Zonaras comes closer than any other Byzantine writer before 1204 to defining the

¹⁰⁷ Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos* 184–185; Magdalino 1983: 333–334.

¹⁰⁸ Theophylact, *Oration to the Emperor Constantine Doukas*.

¹⁰⁹ Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* 1–4; Angelov 2012: 29–32.

¹¹⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 3.4.3 (p. 96). ¹¹¹ Angelov 2012; Magdalino 2000: 32.

¹¹² See above, n. 99.

basileia as a constitutional monarchy, albeit that definition is scattered throughout his history. The definition is reminiscent of, and perhaps partly derived from, the *Eisagoge*: the emperor should be a “law-abiding supervision,” and he should observe and preserve the ancient customs of the *politeia*, which have the force of law. But in certain respects Zonaras goes significantly further. He applies the Aristotelian concept of distributive justice, makes an unprecedented distinction between the public and private roles and resources of the monarch, and emphasizes the Roman republican origins, rather than the divine prototypes, of the laws and institutions that the emperor was bound to uphold.¹¹³ In this last particular Zonaras both recalls and goes beyond Attaleiates, perhaps reflecting a sharpening of the ethos of the legal profession in the intervening half-century of Komnenian rule. What is remarkable is that Zonaras, even more than Attaleiates, combined his secular, Roman, legalistic rationale with a deep conventional piety and respect for the integrity of the Orthodox Church; he was also a canonist and hagiographer of some distinction.¹¹⁴

The combination worked because the Church itself was an important part of the civilian establishment. It was the largest property owner in Constantinople, and the largest employer after the imperial government. It was run as a constitutional monarchy, with its leader, the patriarch, governing in association with a synod of bishops who constituted a representative, deliberative, and legislative assembly. Above all, the Church was the main repository of teaching and learning, and never more so than in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Secular intellectuals were in a minority and tended to end their lives in monasteries, and the best minds in rhetoric and philosophy, with remarkably few exceptions, followed ecclesiastical careers. It was thus predominantly churchmen who possessed the best intellectual tools for constructing and deconstructing the idea and ideal of monarchy. An emblematic example is the famous professor of rhetoric, Homeric commentator, and archbishop of Thessalonike, Eustathios. On the one hand, Eustathios was the most accomplished, effusive, and prolific publicist for the theocratic, heroic image of Manuel I, and an eloquent advocate of monarchical government as idealized by Homer.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, he was positive on the subject of Athenian democracy, and noted that the Venetian republic was a living model of the mixed constitution of antiquity – the combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy that Aristotle had idealized as the most perfect constitution.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Macrides and Magdalino 1992: 126–131.

¹¹⁴ Pieler 1991; Kaltsogianni 2013; Magdalino 1993a: 404–405.

¹¹⁵ Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentary on the Iliad* 308 (on *Iliad* 2.204).

¹¹⁶ Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Exegesis on the Iambic Pentecostal Canon* 226–227; Macrides and Magdalino 1992: 145–147.

It is characteristic of Byzantine rhetorical discourse and political thought that Eustathios did not attempt to harmonize these conflicting perceptions. He did not need to: current events spoke for themselves. When he wrote, it was becoming clear to all thinking Byzantines that the Venetian constitution, like ancient Athenian democracy, was delivering effective and dynamic political cohesion in a way that the imperial monarchy was not. Eustathios deplored the social disobedience that plagued Thessalonike,¹¹⁷ while his student Michael Choniates lamented the disorderly behavior of Greek as opposed to western assemblies,¹¹⁸ and contrasted the inertia of contemporary Constantinopolitans with the dynamism of ancient Athenians.¹¹⁹ Finally, Michael's brother Niketas chronicled the failures of imperial leadership and collective social responsibility that had led to the collapse of the Komnenian dynastic regime by the end of the twelfth century.¹²⁰ He updated and sharpened his critique in the light of the capture of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade (1204), in which the Venetians had played a leading role. Niketas naturally had bitter words for the Latin conquerors, and especially the Venetians, but he mainly criticized the failed performance of the imperial system: the emperors who abused their power and their associates who either corrupted them with servile flattery or betrayed them. Indeed, it fell to Niketas to expose the widening gap between the rhetorical image and the shabby reality of imperial power, between the extravagant claims to godlike perfection that he, like all his educated contemporaries, had been obliged to make on behalf of the emperors who were his patrons and employers, and the lethal cocktail of incompetence, insouciance, arrogance, and desperation with which the emperors attempted to stay on top of the situation. Not unlike Psellos, there is a pattern in his portraiture that makes his critiques of individual emperors add up to a criticism of the system as a whole. Like the monarchical ideal which it inverted, it was a composite of Christian and classical criteria: a denunciation of unconstitutional tyranny and the tragic hubris of power combined with a moral diatribe, in Old Testament tones, against the sinful kings who had brought God's wrath upon the Chosen People of Christ.¹²¹

The totality of Choniates' critique reflected the depth of the shock that the crusader capture of Constantinople caused to the Byzantine ideal of imperial monarchy. The shock was critical because it severed the hitherto indissoluble bond between imperial court and imperial capital, between the sovereign ruler (*basileus*) and the sovereign city (*basileuousa polis* /

¹¹⁷ Magdalino 1996. ¹¹⁸ Michael Choniates, *Speech on his Visit to Euripos in Euboia* 183.

¹¹⁹ Michael Choniates, *Letters* 69–70. ¹²⁰ Niketas Choniates, *History*; see Simpson 2013.

¹²¹ His criticisms are mainly embedded in his descriptions of individuals, especially the emperors Manuel I, Andronikos I, Isaac II, and Alexios III, but there are some passages of general comment, e.g. Niketas Choniates, *History* 143, 209, 453–454, 498–499, 529, 384–585.

urbs regia).¹²² The rupture forced contemporaries, as it requires us, to imagine a Byzantine *basileia* transplanted from its palatial, sacred, and civic setting that had become an integral and characteristic part of the imperial image. Court and capital were soon reunited in the Constantinople of the Palaiologoi, but not before the effort of imagination had succeeded, above all in the empire of Nicaea, where the Laskarid dynasty made government in exile a going concern, and in the third generation produced a consummate political theorist in the person of the emperor Theodore II.¹²³

¹²² Magdalino 2011b. ¹²³ Angelov 2007: 204–252.

CHAPTER 35

HISTORIOGRAPHY AS POLITICAL DEBATE

DIMITRIS KRALLIS

What do you have to say for yourself, O emperor, you and those who crafted this unholy decision along with you? [You put out] the eyes of a man who had done no wrong but risked his life for the welfare of the Romans and who had fought with a powerful army against the most warlike nations when he could have waited it all out in the palace without any danger and shrugged off the toils and horrors of the military life? Of a man whose virtue even the enemy respected?¹

In this passage from his *History*, Michael Attaleiates, a respected judge of the eleventh century, addresses a living emperor. He criticizes Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078) for the decision to blind his predecessor, Romanos VI Diogenes (1067–1071), who had lost to the Turks at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 only to then be defeated by the Doukai in the ensuing civil war. Attaleiates does not mince words as he plunges into political debate, forcing the reader to respond viscerally.² His text targets a person whose family had dominated the empire's politics and who was himself in exile as bishop of Ephesos at the time when the *History* was finished. By deploying such emotive language, Attaleiates breaks with historical traditions that he and other historians of his time espoused, or at least to which they paid lip service. His near contemporary (and a fellow judge) John Skylitzes addressed this problem only a few years later in the introduction to his *Synopsis of Histories*. He explains that among his predecessors:

In composing a rambling account of his own times (and a little before) as though he were writing history, one of them writes a favorable account, another a critical one, while a third writes whatever he pleases and a fourth sets down what he is ordered to write. Each composes his own “history” and they differ so much from each other in describing the same events that they plunge their audience into dizziness and confusion.³

¹ Attaleiates, *History* 176.

² See Krallis 2012 for Attaleiates: xxx–xxvi for the *History*; 29–35 for his circle; 237–243 for broader social contexts.

³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories* 4.35–39 (Wortley tr. p. 2).

Skylitzes focuses on the issue of bias. As far as he is concerned, historians writing about the events of their own lifetime left behind a contradictory record or positive, negative, and even commissioned accounts. He would probably have included Attaleiates among this group, given the latter's overt praise for Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081). Nevertheless, Attaleiates' own introduction promised that his story would be told "in simple and concise terms, as befits those who compose histories, given that my narrative is not part of a competition and so does not require a specialized rhetorical technique." This was appropriate for a work that aimed to "convey clear instruction," objectively dealing with the actions of both good and bad contemporaries in an attempt to "prevent noteworthy matters from slipping into the depths of oblivion through the passage of time, and to grant them immortal remembrance."⁴

We witness here a tension between emotive and partisan accounts of events and an explicit call for objectivity.⁵ Yet it is precisely in Attaleiates' "failure" to maintain an "objective" pose and in other historians' "biases" that we find the seeds of fascinating critical involvement of history with contemporary political affairs. This engagement took different forms. It could, as we saw in the passage above, present itself as a challenge to recent decisions. The historian, in the guise of a Polybian political man, takes center stage and through his work becomes an active participant in ongoing political debates. This is, however, the road less taken by Byzantine historians. On most occasions, as explained by Skylitzes, his peers recounted past events that lay at least a few years, or whole generations or centuries, before their time. Such distance does not, however, necessarily entail disengagement from contemporary affairs. As shown by François Hartog in his analysis of Herodotean ethnography, critique of contemporary political and social realities could easily be displaced onto different geographical and temporal settings.⁶ In Byzantium, the distance of one's subject-matter by no means implied an indifference to current political realities. Critiques of long-dead people could resonate in a society of long-lasting aristocratic lineages, while an engagement with the broad cultural, political, and religious questions of a past age was never innocuous in a polity that valued continuity and seemingly immutable orthodoxies. This chapter will survey the concern of a number of historians with the fate of their polity and their critical engagement with its leaders. The focus here is on the politically potent deployment of the past in contemporary political debates.

⁴ Attaleiates, *History* 7–8.

⁵ The *History* engages with Polybios' *Histories*, yet we find the author unwilling to conform to the Polybian injunction against "tragic history." See Krallis 2012: 52–69; on Polybios and tragic history, see Walbank 1960: 216–234; Rutherford 2007: 504–514.

⁶ Hartog 1988.

In Byzantium, critically engaged historiography was more or less the preserve of highly educated civil servants. Whether currently active in administration, the courts, and the court, or retired (sometimes as monks), they saw themselves as upholders of the traditions of the Roman state.⁷ Given the relative continuity in office-holding among particular families in certain periods, tensions between personal political engagement and objective representation of the past were only to be expected.⁸ The Byzantine historian could not but write with contemporary developments in mind. Even Skylitzes, despite his protestations and notwithstanding the fact that he narrates events unfolding before he was politically active, has been shown to have shaped his history in a manner that engages with the political and social realities of his time, the late eleventh century. Specifically, he is said to have highlighted the past accomplishments of certain powerful families in order to further their integration into the regime of Alexios I Komnenos, whom he too served.⁹ Skylitzes did note that some historians were but spokesmen for the powerful, yet many others were not sycophants.¹⁰ Officials and the state apparatus remained in place when emperors died and dynasties collapsed: the learned among them bore the burden of articulating the ideology and memory of the empire in a manner conducive to political stability in the present and for the future. Furthermore, public opinion in the Byzantine polity witnessed fierce disputations, ideological contestations, and debates, giving the lie to notions of an unchallenged political and cultural orthodoxy.¹¹

It would be a mistake to treat the empire's politics as a one-dimensional game of snakes and ladders leading to the ultimate prize, the throne. When it came to governance, the rulers had generally recognized duties such as the protection of the people, defense of the frontiers, dispensation of justice, the upholding of Orthodoxy, management of accounts, and balancing of books, and tension arose from the different approaches to those goals.¹² Furthermore, there were family agendas, personal strategies, regional interests, and local biases, all pursued within a seemingly immutable though in fact constantly manipulated ideological framework that was shaped by the uneasy coexistence of multivalent Graeco-Roman intellectual traditions and

⁷ Angold and Whitby 2009: 839.

⁸ Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 602 ff. for such continuity from the seventh to the eleventh centuries.

⁹ Holmes 2003: 202–235; Kiapidou (2010: 125–136) offers an earlier possible dating that would undermine Holmes' analysis.

¹⁰ Kaldellis 2010: 212–213. It is interesting that there is no such thing in Byzantium as official histories or royal annals.

¹¹ On administrative continuity, see Attaleiates, *History* 316; on popular expressions and alternative readings of Byzantine politics and ideology, see Kaldellis 2013b; Krallis 2009a; Vryonis 1963: 289–314; for the later Byzantine era, see Shawcross 2008: 89–118.

¹² Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.47 sums up those duties as “a form of service beneficial for one's subjects”; Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories* 18.29 as defending subjects and upholding justice.

the theological requirements and clerical apparatus of the Orthodox Church. Our survey begins at the end of the historiographical caesura that followed the Arab conquest with Theophanes the Confessor's highly politicized *Chronicle* (early ninth century). We will then more briefly discuss the political agendas of the tenth-century historians before pausing in the second half of the eleventh century when Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates offer vivid examples of historical writing engaged in active political debates. Similar patterns will be tracked, albeit in more cursory fashion, in the works of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century historians, who also charted the Roman polity's catastrophic collapse.

HISTORY AS POLITICS IN THE NINTH CENTURY

Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronicle* covers the period from Diocletian (r. 284–305) to the early days of Leo V (r. 813–820), on the verge of second Iconoclasm, and is full of political commentary, some of it vicious. The reshaping of memory in his account of Iconoclasm was deeply influential among historians in the coming centuries and addressed questions regarding imperial policy, the Church, and the controversy over the icons that raged until 842 and was later perceived as a crucial event in Christian Roman history. Going back to our late eleventh-century vantage point, in his introduction to the *Synopsis of Histories* Skylitzes expresses his admiration for Theophanes' mentor George Synkellos and for Theophanes himself, juxtaposing their sober writings to the biased accounts of his own time.¹³ This judgment has perplexed modern readers for, even setting aside its by no means neutral engagement with the controversy over icons, Theophanes' text offers many instances of deep political bias. In a way, it could not have been otherwise. The son of a respected public servant at the court of Constantine V (741–775), Theophanes displayed in his youth a love of the hunt and the pastimes of the aristocracy.¹⁴ Even after he was tonsured he lived the good life, maintaining a portly physique that was at odds with his monastic vocation.¹⁵ This was combined with an active engagement in contemporary political and ecclesiastical debates.¹⁶ Thus even though he was squarely in the iconophile camp, Theophanes displayed a bias against the empress Eirene (797–802) and her advisors, sympathy for the blinded Constantine VI (780–797), hatred toward the iconophile Nikephoros I (802–811), an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis Michael I (812–813), and respect for Leo V (813–820).¹⁷ In fact, the rather messy last

¹³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pref. ¹⁴ Mango and Scott 1997: xliii–lxiii.

¹⁵ Mango and Scott 1997: xlv on portliness.

¹⁶ Hatlie 2007: 358–393 on the political nature of monastic activity in the era of Iconoclasm.

¹⁷ Mango and Scott 1997: lv–lvi.

segment of his *Chronicle*, with its support for that emperor who would soon rekindle Iconoclasm, reveals a historian closely monitoring contemporary politics and offering a personal critical assessment of events as they unfolded.¹⁸

Two contemporary controversies have pride of place in Theophanes' *Chronicle*. Both are linked to the reign of Nikephoros I and were likely part of a lively dialogue in the empire's public arena. First were the so-called ten vexations (*kakoseis*) inflicted by Nikephoros, according to Theophanes, upon the citizens of the empire.¹⁹ The policies in question ranged from forced transfers of farmers to newly conquered territories, to new taxes and other fiscal, military, and corvée impositions on all manner of persons, as well as confiscations of monastic property. Taken as a whole they constituted an ambitious program that gave the government in Constantinople tighter control over society, the economy, and institutions.²⁰ These measures generated significant resentment among affected parties and colored every aspect of Theophanes' hateful and scurrilous portrait of Nikephoros. The *Chronicle's* account was therefore no dispassionate record of past inequity. Rather, it furnished readers with a partisan jeremiad against still-burning policy problems. In fact, Theophanes' glowing account of Eirene's and Michael I's generosity, generic and unspecific as it is, has to be taken with a grain of salt, as it rhetorically brackets Nikephoros' reign with his predecessor's and successor's liberality.²¹ No less political is Theophanes' account of Nikephoros' disastrous campaign of 811 in Bulgaria.²² The *Chronicle's* narrative is embellished with a gloating celebration of Nikephoros' death that speaks to Theophanes' strong dislike for the deceased ruler. Theophanes even shifts his focus away from the suffering of the Byzantine soldiers, so clearly highlighted in the so-called *Chronicle of 811*, to a justly punished Nikephoros.²³ The punishment itself is cast in evocative Herodotean imagery, including the Scythian custom of showcasing the emperor's skull as a drinking cup in the hands of the Bulgar leader.²⁴ In Theophanes' polemical account, even the mournful chorus of the recently bereaved soldiers' relatives joins in a celebration of the tyrant's cruel fate. The root of this drama, we must remember, was hostility to an orthodox emperor's fiscal policies, and not, as is so often the case in Theophanes, religious disagreements.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* lvi–lvii; see Theophanes, *Chronographia* 497–503, here 502.

¹⁹ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 485–487, for the vexations.

²⁰ Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 359–361, 506–507, 720–721, 750–755.

²¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 477 for the generosity of Nikephoros' predecessors; 478 for Nikephoros' search for treasure from the very first days of his reign; 494 on Michael I's generosity.

²² Theophanes, *Chronographia* 489–490.

²³ Stephenson 2006 for the *Chronicle of 811* and Anagnostakis 2002 for a fascinating philological analysis of the propaganda in the accounts of the disaster of 811.

²⁴ Herodotos, *Histories* 4.64–66.

Less studied episodes from the *Chronicle* also point toward Theophanes' contemporary audience. Thus when he recounts the flight, in 808/9, of a number of Byzantine soldiers to the enemy, the mention of one otherwise unknown individual, Eumathios, an expert engineer, suggests that this person was well known to at least some among Theophanes' intended readers.²⁵ Furthermore, on occasion Theophanes deals with contemporary stories that he could not bend to his agenda. Such was the case of the 805/6 campaign against the Arabs in Asia Minor, when, "seized by fright and perplexity, the emperor Nikephoros set out also in a state of despair, exhibiting the courage that comes from misfortune. After winning many trophies, he . . . asked for peace."²⁶ Everything discussed before and after this sentence casts Nikephoros in a bad light and yet his victories had to be mentioned, which suggests that a complete erasure of his successes was impractical when those were much-discussed events among Theophanes' readers. The historian was always treading on a potential minefield of active debate and discussion about recent events.

POLITICIZED HISTORIOGRAPHY UNDER THE MACEDONIAN EMPERORS

For roughly two hundred years after Theophanes, historians continued to engage in sometimes contentious discussions about the empire's past, usually remaining at least a few steps behind the political developments of their day.²⁷ As justifications of the Macedonian dynasty's bloodstained rise to power, the works of Genesios and Constantine VII (913–959) were blatant attempts to manipulate memory. The exercise was political in nature as it used history to bolster the position of a reigning dynasty by disparaging its predecessors and heroizing its founder, but only tangentially touched upon the current management of the empire. The *Chronicle* of Symeon Logothetes, on the other hand, offers an interesting display of source-adaptation and manipulation to an agenda hostile to the Macedonian dynasty. The author used sources that ranged from turn-of-the-century *Constantinopolitan Annals* to accounts that favored the usurper emperor Romanos I Lakapenos (919–944) to present an alternative version of events, one that was somewhat less pro-Macedonian. The work likely addressed members of the elite for whom the issue of succession was far from settled when the Lakapenoi were ousted from the palace in 945 by Constantine VII.²⁸ Here, then, we have a man who surveyed the still

²⁵ Theophanes, *Chronographia* 485. ²⁶ *Ibid.* 482.

²⁷ Kaldellis 2010: 213 on the tendency of historians to present almost all reigning emperors in more or less positive fashion, reserving all criticism for their deposed or deceased predecessors.

²⁸ *ODB*; Jenkins 1965; Markopoulos 1986: 280 on the pro-Lakapenid version A of the manuscript, and 281 on the reworked version B with its pro-Phokas slant.

unsettled political landscape of his day and used history to discreetly set himself on one side of it.

After Symeon, Leo the Deacon reproduced personal observations, material, and perspectives from family chronicles (the Phokas family has often been credited with providing him with one of his sources) as well as an “official panegyric” of the emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976). His *History* mostly focuses on the feats and reign of the warrior emperor and quasi-usurper Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969).²⁹ Leo’s account, surely affected by such triumphalist literature, extolls military virtue and grants the empire’s ruling class and the current emperor Basil II (976–1025), who is by no means eulogized, a cast in which to mold their actions.³⁰ Written at a time when Basil’s authority over the great military families of the empire had only barely been established, Leo’s text attests the existence of alternative political narratives at the court of this most autocratic of Byzantine emperors. Leo was effectively keeping alive the memory of heroic emperorship, from which Basil was to break decisively.

DUELING NARRATIVES IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

A century later, by the second half of the eleventh century, political developments and historical narration had become increasingly synchronous. Non-extant biographical pamphlets or histories extolling the actions of famous military commanders such as George Maniakes and Katakalon Kekaumenos³¹ were supplemented by at least two politically inflected accounts of contemporary affairs. Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates were historians who directly engaged in lively contemporary debates on policy, politics, and personalities. Few issues at the time were more controversial than the reign and demise of the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071). In the immediate aftermath of Romanos’ defeat at the battle of Manzikert (1071), Attaleiates tells how he reached Trebizond, where survivors and stragglers from the scattered Byzantine units had fled on their way back to the capital. At a safe distance from the victorious Seljuks, he reminisces about those who made it and those who were lost:

Present with us were men of the imperial court, among the first in the Senate, who had against all hope escaped the danger with us, though others had been cut down in the battle itself and the flight, among whom was Leo, *epi ton deeseon*, a man notable for his knowledge and speaking ability; and the *magistros* and *protasekretis* Eustratios Choirosphaktes. Among those who were captured was the *protovestis*

²⁹ Markopoulos 1986: 284 citing a statement from Sinaiticus Gr. 482 (1117), fol. 275^v on the numerous accounts of Nikephoros’ deeds circulating in the middle Byzantine period.

³⁰ Talbot and Sullivan 2005: 14–15; Cheynet 1985: 289–315, here 303 n. 43; Ljubarskij 1993: 252–253.

³¹ Shepard 1977–1979: 156; 1992: 54.

Basil Maleses, the emperor's closest associate, invested with the office of *logothetes* of the waters, who was also exceptional in terms of his experience and speaking ability.³²

Attaleiates had earlier discussed the emperor's captivity at the hands of the sultan Alp Arslan and here turns to other Byzantine casualties and MIAs: members of the senate, officials in the bureaucracy and state apparatus, people with important court titles. Maleses is mentioned in another part of the text as a close friend.³³ Both Leo *epi ton deeseon* and Eustratios Choirosphaktes are also numbered among Psellos' numerous correspondents. The former may in fact be the same man whom Attaleiates commemorated in the liturgical calendar of a monastery he founded in Constantinople.³⁴ The presence of these individuals in Attaleiates' *History* defines the social parameters within which discussions about policy and politics unfolded. It also suggests that interpersonal relations among a diverse group of competing yet culturally conversing political agents at the court must be seen both as an essential ingredient of Byzantine politics and as the bearer and shaper of its historical memory. Historiography (like war) was politics by other means.

These debates may be tracked in the works of Attaleiates and Psellos. Both the *History* and the section of Psellos' *Chronographia* on the reigns of Romanos IV and his successor Michael VII were written in the years after Manzikert, Psellos' text some time between 1071 and 1078 and Attaleiates' in 1079/80. Ostensibly their discussions of Romanos IV were part of the blame-game that followed the catastrophic defeat of the imperial army at Manzikert, an event that any historian was bound to discuss. If, however, one expects to find objective detachment and impartial assessment, as envisaged by Skylitzes in his introduction, the *History* and the *Chronographia* will prove disappointing. Attaleiates shows that in the course of Romanos' campaigns in Asia Minor, different ideas were debated regarding the best course of action and he states his own personal position, explaining that he had in fact stood in the thick of it as the momentous events leading up to Manzikert unfolded.³⁵ Psellos for his part also appears by the side of the emperor and even claims that Romanos admired, perhaps even envied, his own firm grasp of military strategy.³⁶ The two historians base their accounts on autopsy and on stories that they can themselves confirm, drawing their authority from the Polybian notion of the *pragmatikos aner*, the political man of action, whom the Greek historian considered the most qualified to write history.³⁷ The two men were not only

³² Attaleiates, *History* 167. ³³ *Ibid.* 188.

³⁴ Papaioannou 1998: 100–101 on Psellos' letters to Eustratios and Leo; Krallis 2012: 29, 34 for the three-way relationship; see Attaleiates, *Diataxis* 65.805–806 for Leo in Attaleiates' monastic charter.

³⁵ Attaleiates, *History* 131. ³⁶ Psellos, *Chronographia* 7B.16.

³⁷ Polybios, *Histories* 20.12.8 on the *pragmatikos aner* as historian.

taking sides, they were defending their own personal histories. Attaleiates, a member of Romanos' inner council, sought to defend that emperor; Psellos, who sided with the Doukai in waging civil war against Romanos, sought to make him seem incompetent to justify his deposition.

All this makes for intensely *political* narratives as each author reacts to events on the basis of his particular experience and position in the spectrum of public opinion. And yet there is more to the two accounts than disagreement about recent events. For individuals such as Psellos and Attaleiates who had, over the years, served successive administrations, participating, more or less actively, in policy debates and even shaping imperial propaganda, history became a means by which to correct many inconvenient truths about their past affiliations. Thus, Attaleiates excoriated the disastrous Michael VII Doukas in his work, having in years past faithfully and profitably served his regime.³⁸ Psellos savaged Romanos IV in a manner that directly contradicts the laudatory orations he had delivered at court for that same emperor.³⁹ Thus in the *Chronographia* he mockingly notes about Romanos:

donning his armor while still in the palace, and taking a shield in his left hand and in his right a huge lance clamped with clinchers, twenty-two forearms long, he fooled himself that with the former he would block the enemies' attacks and with the latter he would flank them.⁴⁰

Did Psellos think Romanos a heroic buffoon and, if so, was this his honest assessment or rather a politically inflected analysis attuned to the prevailing political climate, in which Romanos had been defeated and his rivals the Doukai were in power? During Romanos' reign, Psellos had presented a different view of that emperor's patriotism and dedication to imperial restoration, noting this in a public oration:

Today is a day of salvation, today [brings] freedom from hardship, now is New Rome's strength and strengthening, now an immovable tower of royalty, an unshakable wall, a solid pillar, a foundation supported on the Lord's arms. Today the Lord visited his domain, leaned over from the sky, and saw, and he dispatched his angel from on high and relieved us of present evil and future misfortune, of gathering clouds and arrow shots.⁴¹

More than a hero, Romanos was someone who willingly renounced the comforts of the palace for the perils of the battlefield:

Your soul was not conquered by the adornments and the other trappings of rule, or by the beauty of the crown. But just as you were crowned by God so that we can

³⁸ Krallis 2012: 34–42 for Attaleiates' conflicting loyalties.

³⁹ On Attaleiates and Michael VII, see *ibid.* 35–42. ⁴⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia* 7B.12.

⁴¹ Psellos, *Orationes panegyricae* 18 (pp. 175–176).

live in luxury and happiness, and you take care of us, toiling in all sorts of cares and pain, so too you were adorned with the crown and sharpened the edge of the sword against our enemies.⁴²

But after Manzikert, Psellos' earlier role as a panegyrist and perhaps even ardent supporter of a now defunct regime was a source of embarrassment, if not a liability.⁴³ As persuasively demonstrated by Michael Jeffreys, Psellos was altogether less influential than the readers of the *Chronographia* might assume, and in the years after Manzikert his standing at court steadily eroded.⁴⁴ In that context, the hostile portrayal of the deceased Romanos in the *Chronographia* is not simply one opinion piece among many, it is rather an attempt by the author to reposition himself in a court increasingly uninterested in him. Here, then, contemporary historical commentary serves tangible, personal goals of an explicitly and immediately political nature. Perhaps Psellos was not only justifying his own past but trying to win credit for the future.

Psellos did not succeed in reclaiming a position of influence at the court. He did, however, spur at least one response to his interpretation of recent events. Attaleiates' *History* is, in part, a point-by-point refutation of the *Chronographia*'s portrait of Romanos, through the use of arguments first deployed by Psellos himself in his own earlier period of alignment with Diogenes' regime.⁴⁵ That Psellos and Attaleiates, two more or less self-made men with successful careers in the public eye, decided to debate policy in historical format suggests that the empire's political scene was a space of contestation where, as Skylitzes noted with evident disapproval, different authors produced versions of the past riddled with displays of political or merely personal bias (more often than not the two were indistinguishable).⁴⁶ Furthermore, the social links between Psellos and Attaleiates, implicit in their connection to the three individuals listed as MIAs in the account quoted earlier, suggest that history was a space where intellectual, professional, and social peers, arrayed on opposing sides of the empire's political fault-lines, could negotiate their differences by submitting them to critical scrutiny by an informed public and by articulating the spectrum of a surprisingly polyphonic politics.

That the political scene was contested is confirmed by the production of other forms of political writing. It appears that men of Psellos' and Attaleiates' educational and social background did not merely record history for generations to come but also – depending on their social, intellectual, and political links – frequently produced biopics customized to the needs of influential aristocratic patrons. Few such works survive as

⁴² Psellos, *Orationes Panegyricae* 19 (p. 180).

⁴³ De Vries and Van der Velden 1997: 274–310 on Psellos' proximity to Romanos.

⁴⁴ Jeffreys 2010: 73–91. ⁴⁵ Krallis 2006: 167–191; 2012: 79–99. ⁴⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pref.

self-standing texts. The epic account of the conquest of Crete (961) by Theodosios the Deacon with its adulatory account of Nikephoros Phokas' exploits is evidence of the type of material circulating at the time.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as we saw, a lost pro-Lakapenos account may have shaped Symeon Logothetes' *Chronicle*, while kernels from sources favoring the generals Kekaumenos and Daphnomeles may be found in the work of Skylitzes.⁴⁸ In the sixth century, Agathias had suggested that in public recitations of his *Histories* the audience frequently entered into dialogue with him, openly disagreeing with his view of past events.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, we know little about such conversations between historians and audiences and even less about the channels by which public opinion percolated into polite conversation among members of the elite. To be sure, when Psellos notes that "senators and clerics" asked that he compile an account of contemporary events, he is in effect claiming for himself the role of spokesman for highly placed friends and associates who were in direct dialogue with him in both social and professional settings.⁵⁰

While the notion of political polyphony – or, better, diphonia – has not been extensively developed by scholars of Byzantine history, it is nevertheless evident in the historical *parrhesia* of contemporary works. Thus Attaleiates notes in his critique of the political scene that among

the Romans of our times . . . leaders and emperors commit the worst crimes and God-detested deeds under the pretext of the public interest. The commander of the army cares not one whit for the war nor does what is right and proper by his fatherland, and even shows contempt for the glory of victory; instead, he bends his whole self to the making of profit, converting his command into a mercantile venture, and so he brings no prosperity or glory to his own people. The rest of the army, for their part, take the cue of injustice from their leaders . . . and with an unstoppable and vile eagerness they inhumanly maltreat their own countrymen. They violently seize their property and act like the enemy in what is their own home and country, falling short of the nominal enemy in no respect of evildoing or plunder.⁵¹

Here the historian boldly condemns the entire political class of the empire. This is no critique of a defunct administration that has been replaced by one more conscientious. It is rather a sweeping attack on the empire's elite folded into an argument about patriotic duty.

⁴⁷ Theodosios the Deacon, *The Capture of Crete*.

⁴⁸ Shepard 1977–1979; 1992; Holmes 2005: 229–234; Cheynet 1985: 289–315, for similar phenomena in the work of Leo the Deacon.

⁴⁹ Croke 2010: 31; see Agathias, *Histories* 3.2–7. ⁵⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.22.

⁵¹ Attaleiates, *History* 195–196.

Manzikert and its aftermath was by no means the only issue to elicit critical stances from contemporary historians. A peculiar culture-war marked the eleventh century, providing a vivid backdrop to the military challenges faced by the empire. It pitted thinkers seduced by the humanist turn of Psellos' circle against more conservative forces in the patriarch's palace and society at large. Given the unavoidable mesh of politics and culture, Psellos was forced to fight a number of personal and political skirmishes through letters, pamphlets, poetry, hagiographical literature, and even encomia to his mother.⁵² Furthermore, his quasi-autobiographical reading of the empire's recent history, the *Chronographia*, combines direct criticism of major figures in politics with musings about new forms of philosophical governance in a changing social and political context.⁵³ Thus the scurrilous verses that Psellos leveled against the monks Sabaites and Jacob, who had doubted his commitment to a hasty and opportunistic monastic conversion; the legal brief against the imperious patriarch Keroularios, which entered into a range of cultural and philosophical issues; and the condemnation in the *Chronographia* of an influential minister's otherworldliness and lack of urbane refinement, are all part and parcel of a consistent philosophical attitude toward the social, cultural, and by extension political life of the empire.⁵⁴ What is more, the *Brief History*, Psellos' more conventional prequel to the *Chronographia*, associates Psellos' cultural and political message with a republican approach to Roman history. The claim that "the aristocratic consuls' rule proved itself to the Romans to be stronger than monarchy" is not merely a historical assessment of a bygone age.⁵⁵ Like John the Lydian, who wrote in the sixth century about the institutions of the Roman Republic to highlight the destruction of the last vestiges of traditional politics in Justinian's reign, Psellos adeptly uses the distant past to articulate a critical commentary of immediate relevance.⁵⁶ That history was deployed in the eleventh-century culture-wars is also evident in Psellos' and Attaleiates' similar response to imperial confiscations of monastic lands. It is tempting to see in their accounts of Isaac Komnenos' expropriation of monastic estates historical verdicts on a much discussed and controversial measure. But given what we know of Psellos' attitudes toward monks, it is perhaps easier to ascribe his and likely also Attaleiates' approval of the confiscations to a more personal settling of scores.⁵⁷

⁵² Psellos' *Encomium for his Mother* functions as a political speech.

⁵³ Kaldellis 1999, for the *Chronographia* as a philosophical manifesto.

⁵⁴ Psellos, *Poem* 21.129–133 (*Against Sabaites*), p. 263; and *Poem* 22.81–84 (*Against Jacob*), p. 273; Psellos, *Chronographia* 6A.7–8 for Paraspondylos' otherworldliness.

⁵⁵ Psellos, *Brief History* 10.11, 11.20–24; see Dzelabdžić 2005: 23–34. ⁵⁶ Kaldellis 2005.

⁵⁷ Krallis 2009b for a discussion of these measures.

THE POLITICS OF DECLINE – TWELFTH AND
THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

It is no accident that this multifaceted debate was tossed up precisely during the dramatic imperial collapse of the 1060s and 1070s. The regime of the Komnenoi that took power at that time stirred up debates of its own. Leonora Neville has noted about the Komnenian elite in her reading of Nikephoros Bryennios' *Materials for History* that the public "performance of a history of civil wars of their ancestors necessarily contributed to the formation of identities and allegiances of the twelfth-century courtiers themselves."⁵⁸ The "usable past" of the aristocracy afforded historians such as Bryennios and Anna Komnene opportunities to assess their respective places and roles in the Komnenian order, and also, somewhat obliquely, to criticize the founder of the dynasty. Roughly contemporary with Anna, John Zonaras (d. after 1159) wrote about Alexios' reign from outside the Komnenian circle, noting in his *Epitome of Histories* that:

[Alexios'] concern was the alteration of the ancient customs of the polity . . . he did not treat the state as common or public property, he considered himself to be not its steward but its owner, and he thought of the palace as his own house and called it that. He did not allow the members of the senatorial council the honor that was due to them, nor did he provide for them appropriately, but rather he made it his business to humble them. Nor did he observe the virtue of justice in all things, for the essence of this is distributing to each man according to his worth. But he gave away public money in cartloads to his relatives and certain of his servants, and allotted them fat pensions so that they were able to surround themselves with great wealth and appoint servant staffs more appropriate to kings than to private individuals, and to acquire dwellings, resembling cities in magnitude, and in magnificence in no way dissimilar to palaces. To the rest of the wellborn he did not show similar favor.⁵⁹

If Anna's narrative was driven by the actions of Alexios, his aristocratic allies, and the insolent yet brave crusaders, Zonaras' critique was more broadly systemic. The *Epitome of Histories* addresses a shift in the nature of the polity that the author dates to the reign of Alexios. In Zonaras' republican reading of history, the emperor is but an instrument of the polity, the Roman *res publica*. Zonaras claims to have witnessed the subordination of the polity to dynastic interest. The Roman Republic of virtue, which had rewarded men according to personal worth, was corrupted by the Komnenian politics of lineage. Historical commentary here rises to the level of Roman political thought.

More closely aligned with the Komnenoi, Constantine Manasses also used history to engage, if only indirectly, with contemporary affairs. In his

⁵⁸ Neville 2012: 34. ⁵⁹ Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories* 18.29; see Magdalino 1983: 330.

verse survey of Roman and world history, he cast Augustus, the forerunner of the Byzantine emperors, as a lustful man of wild passions who had to be restrained by the frank speech (*parrhesia*) of the philosopher Athenodoros: a poignant portrait, no doubt resonant in a Komnenian court famously riven by the unchecked passions of its prominent aristocratic members.⁶⁰ In this same work of epic history, that paragon of virtue the emperor Trajan hands his sword to the prefect of Rome before a crowd of senators and other notables, instructing that it be used against him if ever he veered from the path of justice.⁶¹ At a time when Zonaras – a historian outside the charmed Komnenian circle – decried Alexios' authoritarianism and the excessive influence of family upon the institutions of the state, the quasi-republican notion of willing submission by emperors to those institutions was redolent with meaning.⁶²

The chameleonic portrait of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183–1185) that we find in the work of Niketas Choniates (c. 1155–1217) takes Zonaras' powerful and ideological critique of the Komnenian regime to its logical if extreme conclusion. In Choniates' *History*, Andronikos both perfectly matches and at the same time completely inverts Zonaras' assessment of Alexios' regime. The last of the Komnenoi abuses and debases the empire's system of justice, sadistically destroys his political enemies, and morally corrupts his subjects.⁶³ Yet he also emerges as an enemy of the powerful, a friend of the cities and of the majority of the empire's provinces, a prudent administrator, and a contributor to the improvement of Constantinople's public infrastructure.⁶⁴ The Komnenian privatization of the state uneasily coexists here with tenth- and eleventh-century legal notions regarding the protections afforded by the law to the polity's poorer members. Andronikos emerges as the implacable enemy of the Komnenian family system and therefore as the potential solution for the problems outlined by Zonaras. Yet by his time the Komnenoi and their aristocratic allies had so deeply identified themselves with the body politic that an attack on them became an attack on the state. Choniates offers his readers an unsolvable riddle, as no escape seems possible from the route to imperial collapse. With the portrait of this perfect anti-hero, he narrates a reign that perfectly captures the drama of post-1204 society. He has given those

⁶⁰ Manasses, *Summary Chronicle*, lines 1856–1905 on Augustus' temper and philosophers' *parrhesia*; see Magdalino 1992: 197–204 on the place of Eros in Byzantine culture under the Komnenoi.

⁶¹ Manasses, *Summary Chronicle*, lines 2150–2155 on Trajan and the eparch.

⁶² Magdalino 1983: 326–346.

⁶³ Choniates, *History* 334 for assembling friendly judges, and 337 for stuffing ballots; 260 for earlier opposition of the empire's judicial establishment to his policies.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 320, 329 for infrastructure; 325–328 punishing the greed of the powerful, appointing honest tax-collectors, putting an end to the sale of offices.

readers willing to engage with the implications of his analysis a most compelling but paradoxical political and social commentary.

In her untangling of Choniates' manuscript tradition, Alicia Simpson noted that the flexible use of the adverbial *νῦν* ("now, at this very time") allows this former courtier turned historian to engage with individual events, while at the same time conceiving the Komnenian and post-Komnenian era as a bounded historical time.⁶⁵ Simpson also reveals a decades-long process of writing, editing, and rewriting that adjusted Choniates' *longue durée* analysis to his shifting political fortunes.⁶⁶ Thus by narrating an imperial decline that spanned multiple reigns, Choniates expressed a personal, palpably political critique of the social order and individual agents that brought ruin upon his world in the form of the Fourth Crusade.

After the sack of Constantinople in 1204, historians engaged with the tangible reality of foreign conquest and occupation and with the dashed expectations for imperial revival; they often approached contemporary events through the prism of a not so distant past. As shown by Dimitër Angelov, the successful reign of John III Batatzes (1221–1254) – ruler of the so-called empire of Nicaea – becomes in the hands of historians active in Palaiologan Byzantium (1261–1453) a foil for the discussion of the failed policies of his successors.⁶⁷ The imperial confidant George Pachymeres and the less eminent George of Pelagonia criticized the policies of their contemporary rulers by revisiting the past with a focus on the virtuous post-exilic rulers of the new Roman state at Nicaea. In the process, they constructed a vision of governance that echoed Zonaras' and Choniates' more republican view of the polity. Thus by arguing, for example, that Batatzes treated state funds with the respect due to resources that belonged collectively to the polity, George of Pelagonia mirrored eleventh- and twelfth-century critiques of state-funded imperial profligacy targeted at the earlier Paphlagonian, Doukas, and Komnenoi attempts at wholesale appropriation of the republic's resources.⁶⁸

Late Byzantine historians also kept their distance from contemporary events, usually remaining in their accounts a step behind the most recent political developments. That distance notwithstanding, their craft was deployed in eminently political ways. In a system of rule that frequently privileged dynastic political arrangements and relied upon a circumscribed and self-conscious administrative elite for its operation, any critique of past events echoed loudly in the present. At the same time the sorry state of the Byzantine polity in the period after 1204 ensured that historians' memory was inevitably turned to contemporary questions. Through the

⁶⁵ Simpson 2006: 189. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 194. ⁶⁷ Angelov 2007: 267.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 260–269 for Pachymeres and George of Pelagonia.

deployment of models of ideal rule and governance rooted in the more or less distant Roman past, the historians of the later era spoke to the concerns, fears, and even hopes of their fellow citizens about the lived present. On occasion, as in the case of the retired emperor John Kantakouzenos (1347–1354), history took the form of a personal political apologia.

This chapter has presented a reading of history that treats the historian as politically engaged in the present, recognizing the authors themselves as agents active in a fluid political environment. It has also raised a number of questions to which there is yet no satisfactory answer. Who read historical narratives and how were such accounts received in Constantinople and around the empire? What were the boundaries of the empire's political scene and what does it mean that the polity itself was often imagined in republican terms? Where did historians fit in the dialectic between society and imperial authority? Further exploration of these questions will enrich our understanding of what was both politically and intellectually possible in Byzantium.

CHAPTER 36

THEORIES OF DECLINE FROM METOCHITES TO IBN KHALDŪN

TERESA SHAWCROSS

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, a man from the bustling urban environment of the coastal Maghreb fled into the desert and disappeared. Interrupting his career as statesman, jurist, and religious authority, Ibn Khaldūn – or, less succinctly, Abū Zayd ‘Abdu r-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad bin Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍrami (1332–1406) – lived for several years in retreat at the oasis of Qal‘at ibn Salama with the nomadic tribe of the Awlad ‘Arif, a time he spent systematizing thoughts, as he would later write, that had been “pouring into him like cream in a churn.” At length he reemerged, bearing with him in draft form the *Introduction* (*Muqaddimah*) to what would grow into a massive work: the *Book of Lessons* (*Kitābu l-‘ibar*). This work not only enhanced his fame in his native Tunis, but also earned him a prominent courtly appointment in Cairo, where he resided for the next twenty-three years. Cairo had declared itself to have replaced Baghdad as the seat of power of the reestablished caliphate, and therefore as the “center of Islam,” and it ceremonially invested members of the dispossessed Abbasid dynasty with the dignity of their ancestors. It had become known as the “thronging-place of peoples” and the “capital of the world.”¹

Ibn Khaldūn’s avowed aim was to shake off the “drowsy complacency and langor” that had hitherto accompanied his “blind trust” in the intellectual tradition, inherited from “the Greeks” (Plato and especially Aristotle), in which he and all cultivated Muslims had been educated, and strike out alone in pursuit of a new and remarkable type of knowledge. Taking issue with the notion that the past was a subject unworthy of sustained study, which served up “stories of events” and “information

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¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Autobiography* 226–229, 246–247; tr. Cheddadi 140–142, 162–163; Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 3: 274; tr. Rosenthal 3: 315; see Talbi 1986–2004: 825–831; Alatas 2013; Fromherz 2010: 39–113; Fischel 1967; Holt 1984.

about dynasties” without a deeper inner meaning, Ibn Khaldūn sought to establish history as an independent science that could explain human organization from antiquity to his own day, and thus merit inclusion within the curriculum of the places of learning where scholars worked and taught.²

Such claims to originality earned the *Book of Lessons* much criticism, some of it notably sarcastic, from contemporaries wary of the “new method” employed in its pages, and inclined to accuse its author of harboring, as one jostled, a “love of being contrary in everything.”³ With such critiques in mind, modern evaluations have tended to present Ibn Khaldūn as an isolated visionary capable of producing, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, the “greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind” – a work that departed from tradition to prefigure by half a millennium the development of history as a social science – but who in his own lifetime remained underappreciated and misunderstood, having boasted “no kindred spirits among his contemporaries” and kindled “no spark of inspiration among his successors.”⁴

Yet Ibn Khaldūn did not write in seclusion. Though inspired by a desert retreat, his new syntheses required him to consult the kinds of manuscripts and archival documents that, as he wrote, are “only found in cities,” and he relied as well on interaction with fellow intellectuals.⁵ Indeed, the very language of iconoclastic novelty Ibn Khaldūn employed, while anathema to authors of previous eras who had claimed to prize imitation above all things, had in his lifetime been fast acquiring favor within fashionable circles. Already, some years earlier in Byzantium, Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) had questioned the pretensions of the ancient sciences to possess the key to knowledge, arguing that these sciences persisted more through force of habit than intrinsic merit.⁶ Like Ibn Khaldūn, Metochites, though very much a member of the establishment – he resided in the imperial capital, Constantinople, in a mansion next to the ministerial buildings and held the office of chief minister – had urged intellectuals to approach statements of certainty with a measure of resistance and even disrespect, an attitude that earned him renown among his contemporaries for “the innovativeness and individuality of his nature.” In his large

² Ibn Khaldūn, *Autobiography* 228–230; tr. Cheddadi 142–143; and *Introduction* 1: 1–8, 50, 61–63; tr. Rosenthal 1: 1–14, 63, 77–79; Fromherz 2010: 1–2, 85, 114–115, 118; Dale 2006: 431–451.

³ Al-Sakhāwī, *Light Shining* 4: 146; Ibn Arabshah, *Life of Timurlane* 295–299.

⁴ Toynbee 1934–1961: v. 3, 321–328; Irwin 1997: 461–479. For discussions of Ibn Khaldūn’s intellectual context and reception, see Rosenthal 1983: 166–178; Gates 1967: 415–422; Lawrence 1983: 153–165.

⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Autobiography* 230; tr. Cheddadi 143; see also Fischel 1956a; 1961: 109–119; 1967: 28–29, 49; Fromherz 2010: 118.

⁶ For introductions to Metochites, see Angelov 2004: 15–22; Ševčenko 1962; 1975; 1982: VIII; De Vries and Van der Velden 1987.

volume of essays, the *Notes of Opinions* (*Semeioseis gnomikai*), the Byzantine had recorded in detail the processes of association, juxtaposition, and subversion through which explorative thinking is elaborated, constructing out of the “host of things” he assembled “one by one” as they flowed forth “from all sides in various directions” a ground-breaking and momentous work: a “new wonder of a book,” as one of his compatriots called it, which, because it resembled nothing that had come before it, aimed to convey profound truths accurately where other works had failed.⁷

It seems that in early fourteenth-century Constantinople, as in late fourteenth-century Cairo, something in the atmosphere sent an electrical charge through authors, galvanizing them into revising the intellectual framework in which they had hitherto operated. This is not to suggest that Ibn Khaldūn personally knew the writings of Metochites or drew his inspiration directly from them; no evidence exists that lets us establish a direct link between specific manuscripts of their works. Yet information and ideas could travel effectively to distant groups by means other than the narrowly textual, as long as appropriate economic channels and social networks existed – and certainly the exchange of numerous embassies attests to a close relationship between the two capitals across the period. Besides, the argument advanced here is one less concerned with tracing influence than with highlighting common themes that reflected the spirit of the age. Preoccupations that have so far been attributed to the invention of a single man of genius can be shown to have emerged and evolved gradually over the course of nearly a hundred years along the shores of the Mediterranean, where they were shared by Christian and Muslim thinkers alike. Among these thinkers were a number of Byzantines: not only Metochites, but Barlaam (Bernard Massari, 1290–1340), Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), Nikephoros Gregoras (c. 1295–c. 1360), John (Ioasaph) Kantakouzenos (c. 1293–1363), Demetrios Kydones (1324–1398), and George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355–c. 1452).⁸

MEDITERRANEAN RESPONSES TO A CHANGED GEOPOLITICAL REALITY

Seen in the context of their time and place, the views of Ibn Khaldūn and Metochites reflect a growing awareness of the inadequacy of established analytical categories in the face of the convulsions shaking both Byzantine and Egyptian society – convulsions that are traceable back to seismic shifts

⁷ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 63–67 (ed. Müller and Kiessling) and 264–265 (ed. Hult); Gregoras, *Letters* 2: 80–81 (ed. Leone); *Roman History*, v. 1, 269–273.

⁸ See Lippard 1983: 213; Canard 1935: 669–680; 1935–1945: 197–224; 1939: 27–52; Ševčenko 1974: v. 1, 69–92.

in distant Central and East Asia. The population of the Mediterranean and its European and African hinterlands had long felt a gravitational pull toward the technological powerhouses of India and China, via a vast network of land and sea routes along which gold and silver bullion were exchanged for spices, silks, and other manufactured goods. The construction of empires had mostly rested on three interlinked corridors on the Mediterranean's eastern flank through which these commodities passed. By exercising monopolies over two of the three corridors, the Muslim caliphate centered on Cairo and the Christian Byzantine empire centered on Constantinople had become the basin's dominant superpowers during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, with spheres of influence extending respectively across Italy and North Africa. The Egyptian Fatimids thus controlled the corridor connecting the Libyan Sea with the Red Sea, the Arabo-Persian Gulf, and eventually the Indian Subcontinent and Indonesia, while the Byzantine Macedonian dynasty controlled the corridor connecting the Aegean with the Black and Caspian Seas to the Central Asian Steppe and eventually China. These twin imperial forces viewed themselves as states of equivalent standing, and divided hegemony between them in the hope of maximizing inter-regional stability. A third corridor, meanwhile, centered since the eighth century on Baghdad, still connected Syria with Mesopotamia, the Hindu Kush, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asia. More landlocked than the other two, this corridor, owing to its economic potential and the fading authority of its ruling Abbasid dynasty, attracted the attentions not merely of the Egyptians and Byzantines to its west, who increasingly clashed militarily with one another over control of Syria-Palestine, but also of various steppe peoples to its east, including the Seljuk Turks and the Turkomans, who began to mount a series of incursions from Transoxiana into the Fertile Crescent.⁹

From the second half of the thirteenth century onwards, this encroachment took especially dramatic form. The expansion of the Turko-Mongol confederation led by Genghis (Chinggis) Khan and his descendants not only brought much of Asia under a single, overarching authority, but also seized the lands bordering the Tigris and Euphrates and exerted mounting pressure on the Crimea and Balkans, as well as Asia Minor and the Levant, through the presence of the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde. They swept through Syria and Thrace in 1299 and 1337, devastating the regions. The threat was compounded by the fact that, as they had moved across Central Asia from their homelands near Manchuria, they had confiscated (as grazing for their cavalry) the pastures belonging to Turkic peoples

⁹ Abu-Lughod 1989: 137–247; Gills and Frank 1996a: 81–114; 1996b: 143–199; Doumanis 2014: 441–456; Pollard 2014: 457–474; Lev 1995: 190–208; 1999–2000: 273–281; Shepard 2012: 505–545.

such as the Kipchaks and Khwarezmians. These displaced Turks turned up in growing numbers on the Mediterranean superpowers' borders, raiding deep into the south of Syria from the 1240s and into the west of Asia Minor from the 1290s. One of the most effective leaders, Osman, after whom the Ottomans would be named, established in 1326 a small emirate governed from Bursa in Bithynia, while his successors, aided by further arrivals of "nomad families," began to make their mark in southern Asia Minor and the eastern Balkans.¹⁰

Already in 1258, the Mongol Hülegü's sack of Baghdad, which created a wave of refugees and sent populations around the eastern Mediterranean into a panic, warned of the fate that awaited Cairo and Constantinople if they did not take prompt action. The two superpowers responded by entering into an economic and political alliance with one another, formalized in 1281 in a treaty of "friendship, affection and love" that held until 1328 and was renewed in 1348. When military campaigns against the invaders did not result in a decisive victory, they resorted to diplomatic overtures, arranging a series of intermarriages that included those in the 1320s of Özbek Khan to the daughter of the emperor Andronikos II or III, and of the sultan al-Nāṣir to Özbek's niece. A school was even founded in the palace in Constantinople for beautiful young women, both noble and common, who were brought up "like the princesses" as "ladies of the imperial family" and, when the occasion arose, sent as consorts to "the barbarians."¹¹ Such measures notwithstanding, neither the caliphate nor the empire in the end could prevent the loss of their provinces or the infiltration and conquest of their heartlands. By the early fifteenth century, they had become vassal states. Direct control of their capitals was surrendered in 1453 and 1517.¹²

Trying to explain their states' vulnerability in the fourteenth century, Egyptian and Byzantine elites began by identifying proximate causes. They accused politicians of mismanagement. They decried legal and financial institutions as ossified and ineffectual. They discussed the flaws of specific constitutional leanings, criticizing their states' emphasis on monarchical government and suggesting that oligarchy or even democracy needed to be taken seriously as alternatives. But they also were able to see the problem more systemically. This meant questioning the assumption, prevalent in both the caliphate and the empire, that legitimate power resided in the pursuit of a proselytizing mission entailing the induction of other peoples.

¹⁰ Ahmad bin Yahya b. Salman bin Ashik-Pasha, cited in İnalçık 1998: 393; see Savvides 1981; Langdon 1998: 95–139; Amitai-Preiss 1995: 214–235; Korobeinikov, 2010: 692–728; Morgan 1986: 136–174; Melville 2009: 51–101; Lindner 2009: 102–137; İnalçık 1981: 71–79.

¹¹ John Kantakouzenos, *Histories*, v. 1, 188.

¹² Runciman 1960; Lippard 1983; Broadbridge 2008; Canard 1935: 669–680; 1935–1945: 197–224; 1939: 27–52; Dölger 1952: 60–79.

Imperialist propaganda issued by the two states had reflected this assumption, habitually asserting a mandate to export a particular way of life, and linking that mandate to a vision of the entirety of humanity progressing toward the fulfillment of its potential.¹³

Within these elites, some thinkers continued to rehearse the argument that humanity was elevated over the rest of creation by virtue of the fact that it alone possessed the social and political structures conducive to a highly organized, collective, indeed urban way of life. “There are,” it was repeated, “absolutely no republics of lions or elephants or of any species of beasts.” Making and obeying laws, with all the civic and political bonds and obligations that accompany them, is the exclusive province of people: of subjects who honor “with their respect those who rule” and pay “them taxes in order to recompense them”; and of rulers who assume “such a care for the preservation of their subjects that they place themselves in danger for them, sometimes even to the extent of giving up their own lives.” Such self-restraint and self-sacrifice allow individuals to congregate together in settlements, where they cooperate to provide one another with mutual aid, and pool resources to ward off things injurious to the common good and acquire things profitable to it. Through collective organization, in this view, people transcend mere survival to enjoy the refinements made possible by leisure and the consequent pursuit of specialized skills involved in the arts and crafts. Thus have we advanced from building crude shelters against the elements to employing an “infinity of materials” and “myriad forms” to create “all the ornaments that can be added” to our habitations. Thus have we fashioned civilization, with all its trappings: from our food, to our pots and pans, to our domestic furnishings, to our clothing and our shoes, to our chariots.¹⁴

In contradistinction to this conventional view, other thinkers increasingly asserted that humanity could best realize its potential not by replicating everywhere the urbanized institutional structures of the coastal Mediterranean, but by rejecting them. These thinkers argued that undue attention to “everything done by the Greeks and said of the Greeks” had distorted intellectual outlooks. Because the “sciences of only one nation, the Greeks, have come down to us,” this view insisted, contemporaries remained blinded to other forms of enlightenment – specifically,

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 5; tr. Rosenthal 1: 10; Metochites, *Semeioseis* 604–699 (ed. Müller and Kiessling); Theodore Palaiologos, *The Teachings* 50–54, 108–110; see Nicol 1988: 51–55; Lambton 1981: 83–151; Black 2001: 81–148 (when the Egyptian caliphate was a bastion of Shi’a Islam, attitudes toward jihad differed from those that emerged later under the Ayyubids and Mamluks). For Byzantine attitudes to decline, see the classic Ševčenko 1961: 169–186. For the distinction between proximate and systemic causes, see Fukuyama 2014: 455–466, 524–548. For accusations of corruption, see Guilland 1952: 35–46; Shawcross 2008: 90–118.

¹⁴ Kydonēs, *On Despising Death* 15–20; Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 6, 309–310; tr. Rosenthal 1: 11–12, 347–348; there are echoes here of Plato, *Republic* 372d–373c.

the possibility that humanity might attain its most perfect state not through the practices associated with urbanism, but rather in the pastoralism practiced by nomads.¹⁵

Applying the abstract interrogation of civilization to the vicissitudes faced by specific traditional empires, such thinkers turned to the historical record, extrapolating from the past in order to interpret the present. They debated whether the nomads making inroads on the Mediterranean should be identified with the epitome of all that was noblest in humans, or dismissed as subhuman creatures akin to “dogs jumping on a corpse and tearing at it.” Was the Turko-Mongol overlord, the Great Khan, the “greatest ruler the world has ever known,” as one observer from the northwestern fringes had recently claimed?¹⁶ Would the entirety of the “inhabited world” belong to the khan and his ilk not only in the present but in the future? Or was nomad power also inherently flawed and thus likely to experience the same fate of decline and destruction suffered by those it superseded? What would be the long-term impact of the armies of the Seljuks, Turkomans, Ilkhans, Golden Horde, Ottomans, Chagatayids, Gurkanids, and other groups from the steppes? And if not the nomads, then what other political actors and forms of power should be identified as potential creators of a new kind of order – a genuinely global one – greater than the outmoded Christian and Islamic empires that hitherto had claimed to represent the closest thing on earth to universal and eternal dominion?¹⁷

SEDENTARY AND NOMADIC POPULATIONS IN THE CIVILIZATIONAL CYCLE

As the fourteenth century unfolded and the nomad raiders settled in the Mediterranean – becoming a permanent feature first of the cultivated hinterland that supplied the superpowers’ cities, and then of the cities themselves – the approaches to such questions evolved, shifting gradually from a romanticized understanding of these invaders to a deeply cynical one. In his *Notes of Opinions*, composed in the 1320s, Metochites began his ruminations on the past by praising the city of Rome. The pinnacle of all history had been reached, he declared, at the dawn of the Roman empire, brought into being by divine providence for the purpose of propagating religion. Through the benevolence of God, he wrote, the world theater had been cleared of strife and made ready for the “miraculous presence of the divine Word.” The establishment under

¹⁵ Metochites, *Miscellanea* 8 and 93 36–41; Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 61–3; tr. Rosenthal 1: 77–79.

¹⁶ Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 1, 535; Marco Polo, *The Million* 495.

¹⁷ See Graf 1941: 77–85; Kaldellis 2013a: 156–166; Broadbridge 2008: 6–26.

Caesar Augustus of an imperial regime “ruled by one man” had ensured that as many lands and cities “as there are under the sun” would be at peace with one another, and therefore amenable to “the teachings and reckonings of salvation.” The dissemination of Christianity among the nations, and thus of civilization, had gathered pace with the conversion of Constantine and his foundation of Byzantium – the inheritor of the Roman empire, through the transplantation of the imperial capital from Rome to Constantinople, situated at the very frontier with the unenlightened barbarians. Moreover, Metochites wrote, if Constantine had been the first to be chosen as “worthy to receive the divine faith, glory and power” and make it known to all, his successors in the imperial office would continue to act as chosen delegates on earth, carrying out the evangelization of the Gentiles on behalf of the divinity until the very end of human time.¹⁸

Yet although Metochites echoed views regarding the special covenant between earthly and heavenly rulers first expressed in the fourth century by Eusebius of Caesarea – views that had become accepted among Byzantines during the intervening millennium – his aim was not in fact to uphold these views, but rather to emphasize how much at odds they were with historical reality. Pursuing his own private investigations, he explained, he had found himself revisiting and reinterpreting the history of Roman rule from its beginnings. Although there may well have been a time when the “great state” had held sway from “the British Isles in the west” to the “Euphrates in the east,” and from “the Germans and Celts” and “the Caspian and the Caucasus in the north” to “Ethiopia in the south as well as Arabia and towards Libya,” the empire in effect had never managed to dominate “the whole world,” nor even the “inhabited part” of that world. Nor had the portion of “mankind upon whom Christianity had exerted its influence” lived entirely within imperial boundaries.¹⁹

In any case, even such partial successes as had been realized, Metochites observed, were “now gone, clearly gone, declining little by little and over a long period,” until the state in his own lifetime had been reduced to a “wreck” teetering on the “very brink of the abyss.” Things had turned out “in such an evil way, truly,” that skepticism seemed the only rational way forward. People, Metochites noted, believe “too readily” in the constant intervention of providence in their humdrum and paltry lives. Belief in the influence of a providential destiny within the political sphere was similarly misplaced. Politics are governed by flux and change, and the growth of power should be attributed as much as anything else to the vagaries of

¹⁸ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 587–591, 699–727 (ed. Müller and Kiessling); Shawcross 2008: 109–111.

¹⁹ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 231–232.

fortune's wheel and the possession of "luck for a while." The movement occurs over and over again, like an endless dance in which the partners repeatedly spell one another: leaders keep on emerging to rule imperially over others, while those who previously held dominion keep on ending up as slaves. Such had been "formerly the case with the Assyrians who, having failed, passed under the Macedonians, while the Macedonians in turn passed under the Romans." Given this recurring pattern of rise and fall, it would be deluded to believe that the imperial regime under which he himself lived could somehow be spared.²⁰

While recognizing how difficult it was for a monarchical republic such as Byzantium to maintain power, it would be wrong, Metochites added, to argue for the devolution of authority to different regions and the establishment there of oligarchies or democracies, following the models of civic government in ancient Greece. Many of his fellow citizens, he noted with displeasure, had erred in this respect by becoming obsessed with "what happened to the Seriphians collectively and in some cases perhaps individually, or to the Melians, the Siphnians, the Sicyonians, and to the other hamlets of the Peloponnese, the backwaters of the Greek mainland or the islets of the Aegean." Indeed, to spur on even an emperor to a particular action, he remarked wryly, increasingly one only had to cite "what some citizen of Athens, Sparta, Thebes, or perhaps Megara, Eretria or Aegina," no matter who or how insignificant, had done or said. This was senseless, he implied, since in fact, as empires come and go, so too must autonomous city-states.²¹

In elaborating these perspectives Metochites effectively undermined claims, dear to the Byzantines, regarding the superiority of the indigenous political structures of the Mediterranean, first casting doubt on the durability of the imperial institutions of Rome, and then dismissing the model offered by the Greek city-states as an alternative. Since all constitutions that had hitherto been imagined were faulty, the countries and nations shaped by them had likewise been built on shaky foundations. Among the political precedents that his immediate environment afforded, Metochites saw none that guaranteed protection against decline and might therefore be worthy of emulation. If an exception to the transience that threatens all human affairs could be found, he went on to assert, it was in the nomadism practiced outside all civilizational norms. The "greatest nation of the world," he declared, was that of "the Scyths," since it was they who possessed most of the habitable world – including the parts that were practically uninhabitable.²²

²⁰ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 277–302; 405–412; 725–726, 751–757 (ed. Müller and Kiessling); see Beck 1952: 76–95; Metochites, *Poems* 32.

²¹ Metochites, *Miscellanea* 8 and 93 36–41.

²² Metochites, *Semeioseis* 723–729 (ed. Müller and Kiessling); Kaldellis 2013a: 161–164.

A provocative argument, it construed the nomadic way of life as the supreme way of purity and power. Down the ages “from antiquity to our time,” he wrote, nomads alone had always been free, their societies characterized by an indomitability that persisted even when members of those societies were captured and subjugated. Like all human beings, “the Scyths” lived socially, yet instead of dwelling in cities or even small towns or villages, surrounding themselves with walls, they remained always on the move, sleeping in tents that they carried about on wagons. Abjuring crafts, trade, and agriculture, they avoided the arduous practices of cultivation and did not even bother with complicated preparation of food. Because they adhered to no constitution, they did not engage in the lobbying, slander, and conspiracies that inevitably attach to the public affairs of polities; nor did they have any truck with those dogmatists and rhetoricians who twist language in order to justify false positions and sell dubious policies. Instead, theirs was a simple life, led without artifice and unencumbered by political wheeling and dealing. Despite his own society’s self-proclaimed role as champion of orderly, lawful government, Metochites concluded, it was in fact the nomads who possessed an authentic consciousness of the right and the just. By behaving “according to nature,” they had maintained their innate nobility, and consequently their society remained durable where others plunged into decline.²³

Although Metochites claimed to be a dispassionate observer of “the Scyths,” his idealized portrayal of nomadic life and peoples owed little to sources providing first-hand knowledge of pastoral steppe society. He neither identified the people he described as belonging to a specific tribe or current confederation, nor commented on kinship structures, ceremonies, dress, and equipment, or even place names or personal names. Lacking concrete detail, his noble barbarians remained imaginary beings intended to serve primarily as a mirror held up to his own society, revealing its faults. In transposing the categories of civilized and barbarian, he aimed not to erase modalities of thinking that relied on the opposition of discrete identities, but to reinforce them: the pointed contrast between the decadence of luxury and the vigor of primitive existence was intended as a shock tactic that would shame his Byzantine compatriots into action, encourage them to return to proper conduct, and thus rescue the empire.

Yet by the early 1330s, the dichotomy Metochites had employed had begun to melt away before his eyes. His property confiscated during a coup at court, he took refuge in a monastery, from which he could watch as his mansion was demolished – the expensive floor mosaics taken up and sent as a gift not to his replacement as chief minister or to some other Byzantine official, but rather to the “ruler of the western Scyths,” a Mongol khan of

²³ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 729–734 (ed. Müller and Kiessling).

the Golden Horde, Özbek, who had requested them “so that he could decorate the floors of his own home.” To Metochites the incident represented a disquieting blurring of boundaries. The acquisition of mosaic flooring by those of nomadic origin signaled the abandonment of pastoralism in favor of ambitions and desires in keeping with sedentary life within imperial territories. It seemed that nomads were attempting to create empires in the image of those they were dismantling.²⁴

By the 1350s, members of Metochites’ circle who belonged to the younger generation, including his former pupil Nikephoros Gregoras, had taken up the issue, ruefully noting in their writings that nomadic populations had an established history of assaulting sedentary societies and then assimilating into them. In his *Roman History* (*Romaïke Historia*), Gregoras compared rising incursions by the Ottomans to those by “the Scyths,” meaning perhaps the invasion by the Seljuks in the eleventh century or, more likely, by the Mongols in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. These “Scyths,” he noted, arriving in the Fertile Crescent, had been “pleased with the grace of the land,” and thereupon “stopped their peregrinations.” Whereas they had once used “clubs, slings, spears, and bows and arrows,” and had been content to “wear unworked hides and the skins of animals” for clothes, in time they had come to favor “garments made exclusively of silk and gold thread.” They had also changed their religion, laws, and customs, and indeed their whole way of life, “positioning themselves at the opposite extreme to that of their previous existence.” Having conquered the local urban society and levied taxes on its members, whom they had meanwhile turned into their subjects, they had created an empire in Mesopotamia imitating those of the “Assyrians, Persians, and Chaldeans.” Under the Ottomans, Gregoras hinted, an analogous process was underway in Asia Minor and the Balkans.²⁵

It should not be assumed, he added, that tribal confederations with nomadic traditions would stay in power after adapting to an urban environment. Such adaptations bring into play the seductive presence of material comforts. Gregoras noted that “the Scyths,” having settled in the region “best suited for every type of human delight,” had pursued “a life of pleasure” whose “excessive extreme” of “luxury” bore clear signs of “decadence.” Nomads removed from their origins on the harsh steppes and exposed to the temptations of urban society, he postulated, predictably went soft. The transition from the nomadic to the sedentary way of life – at once the culminating phase of human development and the ultimate cause of human destruction – belonged to a pattern that constantly repeated itself within history. All human groups enter a self-perpetuating

²⁴ Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 1, 30; Kaldellis 2013a: 164–166.

²⁵ Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 1, 30–40.

civilizational cycle whose successive stages pass from rusticity to sophistication, thence to a decadence associated with moral turpitude and, ultimately, political ruin. There was no escaping this pattern. If the Byzantine empire in which he himself lived was doomed, the same end, Gregoras concluded, awaited the Mongols, the Turks, and indeed all those currently ascendant. From the moment Central Asian peoples first became desirous of Mediterranean goods, they set themselves on a path not only to gain another's empire, but also to experience the inexorable erosion and collapse of their own authority.²⁶

No member of the Constantinopolitan ruling class in the last decades of the fourteenth century appears to have elaborated upon the insights Gregoras sketched out. The avoidance of the theme may be attributed to the fact that the Byzantine emperor John V was forced in 1371 to accept the overlordship of former nomads and pay them tribute; by contrast, the Egyptian sultan Faraj would not find himself in a similarly humiliating position until 1402. In the intervening period, those within the ambit of Cairo had the opportunity to develop more fully ideas previously "touched on by way of exhortation in a belletristic style."²⁷ In his *Book of Lessons*, Ibn Khaldūn concurred that the passage from grandeur to desolation was an inevitable evolution in human community. The "group feeling" or "solidarity" that allows people to cooperate in order to satisfy their needs, he wrote, inevitably speeds up urbanization, for as soon as some sort of social organization is formed, people gather together in a more permanent fashion in one place and civilization results. Continued population concentration spurs on more complex forms of civilization, as an ever-greater diversification of labor escalates the production of material goods. Having obtained necessities, people seek out comforts and refinements, and this habituation to a higher standard of living constitutes both the goal of a society and the point at which that society begins to decline. Indeed, the easier the life enjoyed by a society, Ibn Khaldūn observed, the closer that society is to extinction.²⁸

It was a useful template for the rise and fall of societies over time, one that delivered up that inner meaning by which Ibn Khaldūn sought to establish history as an independent science of human organization. Compared with urban populations, nomads – here Ibn Khaldūn drew on examples ranging from the Arabs and the Berbers, to the Mongols, Ottomans, Kipchaks and other Turks – face the constant challenge of hardship, and their social cohesion continues to grow as long as they

²⁶ Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 1, 40.

²⁷ Gibb 1933–1935: 25; Fromherz 2010: 114–148; Nicol 1993: 277; Broadbridge 2008: 193–195.

²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 67–71, 224–233, 251, 305–306; 2: 255–261; tr. Rosenthal 1: 84–91, 252–262, 282, 343; 2: 291–297. For the economic aspect of Ibn Khaldūn's theories, see Spengler 1964: 268–306; Boulakis 1971: 1105–1118.

pursue their original way of life and retain their initial savagery and toughness. Contact with urbanism is unavoidable, however, since the same cohesion and power generated by their traditional way of life enables them to conquer sedentary peoples. Their leader consequently founds a state that expands, encompassing cities and developing eventually into an empire. New-found prosperity among the conquerors induces corruption, bodily weakness, and effeminacy. As their appetite for luxury reveals itself to be insatiable, the burdens placed on their subjects grow apace. Although the ruling class may succeed for a while in deceiving those subjects with emblems and ceremonial displays of equestrian and fighting skills, the culture of manly vigor they ritualize is on the wane. Meanwhile, the continual rise of taxation results in the diminishment of entrepreneurship, the breakdown of civic engagement, and the fomenting of discontent and rebellion. At some point, another nomadic people, still strong and untainted by civilization, will come in and replace its predecessors, resetting the system in a cycle whose sequence of stages may repeat itself indefinitely. The permanent exercise of power by any of these groups within a sedentary environment was, Ibn Khaldūn concluded, as illusory as a “mirage in the desert,” since dominance was always compromised – often within four generations or a little more than a century.²⁹

Culminating with Ibn Khaldūn, the statesmen and thinkers active in the Byzantine and Egyptian courts in the fourteenth century propounded the model of a civilizational cycle. Though they deployed the language of political theory and history in their approach to contemporary developments, they were by no means ignorant of the situation on the ground. All of them could claim a personal connection with their subject of study since they, their relatives and patrons had participated in exchanges with the invaders. Even Metochites had gone in his youth on an embassy to the periphery of the Ilkhanate. Moreover, he counted among his kinswomen the wife of Abagha Khan and stepmother of Ghazan sultan, Maria Palaiologina (otherwise known as “Maria of the Mongols”), and indeed commissioned a portrait of her.³⁰ Yet, in their writings, they chose to present the varied nomadic groups they had encountered as manifestations of a single phenomenon for which an all-encompassing explanatory model could and should be offered.

²⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 223–225, 302–317; tr. Rosenthal 1: 252–253, 339–355; Fromherz 2010: 128, 130; White 1959: 113–121; Stuurman 2013: 47–51.

³⁰ Both Metochites and Maria, indeed, were commemorated as major donors of the monastery to which he retired and in which Gregoras also resided. Of the other writers, Kantakouzenos married one of his daughters to the Ottoman sultan Orhan, while Kydonēs was the son of a diplomatic envoy to Özbek of the Golden Horde. Similarly, as will become apparent later, Ibn Khaldūn spent considerable time with Tamerlane and conversed with him. See Runciman 1960: 46–53; Lippard 1983: 217; Nicol 1996: 76–78; Fischel 1967: 48.

Through this model, the authors aimed to illustrate and explain the experience of the sedentary populations to which they belonged as well as to exculpate themselves, as members of the dominant class, from charges of misrule. They insisted that all states and regimes that might flourish in the urbanized environment of the Mediterranean basin would exist within a recurring pattern of rise and fall that could be neither circumvented nor reversed. When a polity's time was up, its existence could not be prolonged by reforms, however far-reaching, even for "a single hour."³¹ Though ruling elites might be alert to the change in their regime as it occurred, and might undertake adjustments and repairs accordingly, such efforts would always prove futile. Habit becomes binding as generations pass: a man who has seen his father and his grandfather govern in a particular manner and wear "silk and brocade and use gold ornaments for weapons and mounts," Ibn Khaldūn asserted, will not be able to diverge from the customs of his forebears.³²

In the works produced in the early decades of the century, practitioners of nomadism were depicted as still close to the raw, natural state of humanity, and therefore both wholly outside the political and social norms of civilization and also immune to its flaws. By the century's close, however, attitudes had shifted, and nomads were presented as more and more susceptible to the same forces as the sedentary populations they were taking over. Even dwellers in the remotest reaches of the wilderness were believed to carry within themselves the seeds of their decay, in the form of an irrepressible desire to integrate within an urban environment and eventually succumb to its corruptive force. This interpretation helped commentators dismiss the achievements of the newcomers from Central Asia by framing the expansion of tribal confederations as an event subject to diminishment over time. Yet while analyzing the Turko-Mongol conquests in this manner may have initially served to console those who had formerly ruled imperially but were now losing their grip on power, it had implications that went deeper, leading to a fundamental reevaluation of the relationship of humanity to both its manmade and its natural environments.

NATURAL DETERMINISM AND ITS PROBLEM FOR EMPIRES

Interpreting the troubles faced by the two late medieval Mediterranean empires as signs of an implacable civilizational law meant rejecting people's ability to be masters of their own fate. In the view under discussion here, human beings were revealed as caught in the cogwheels of an impersonal mechanism they could never hope to control. We are "like the silkworm that

³¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 2: 106–108, 255–265; tr. Rosenthal 2: 117–118, 291–301.

³² Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 2: 107, 255–257; tr. Rosenthal 2: 117–118, 291–293; Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 1, 396.

spins and then, in turn, finds its end amidst the threads itself has spun,” Ibn Khaldūn wrote.³³ This view forced a reconsideration of the limits of collective and personal agency, as well as a radical redefinition of what it means to be human. The process reinterpreted the Aristotelian definition of man as “an animal political by nature” to reveal a truth that was the reverse of the one ancient philosophy had intended. We believe, explained Ibn Khaldūn, that if we are to become fully human, we cannot do without that for which “the philosophers use the technical term polis” – that is, the assemblage of the physical fabric, institutions, practices, and values of a city.³⁴ Yet, though we may believe that involvement in public life and civic responsibilities rescues us from our basest instincts by elevating us above the behavior of beasts, we do not in fact choose to behave as we do, but rather – like the rest of the animal kingdom – are compelled by impulses inherent in us. Obedient in this way to the dictates of natural law, we should not be surprised to find that our works are subject to the same pressures as we ourselves are, and indeed as is the whole physical world. Just as a man who “has reached the age of forty” finds that his body “stops growing for a while then starts to decline,” so too is it “with civilization,” Ibn Khaldūn insisted. Our own future as mortals and the future of the things we create with our hands and minds are analogous, indeed interconnected, as are our polities also – each suffering a process of decay that replicates the “senility” manifest in all living beings. As when a plant or an animal is born and reaches its prime, then afterwards declines and dies, so is it with states, for these come into being, rise to preeminence, then gradually subside, dwindling little by little until they are replaced by others. With the passage of time, the authority once enjoyed by the Byzantine empire and the Egyptian caliphate had simply “slipped away under the influence of the laws of nature,” as these states ceded their place in earthly affairs to others – which in turn would also fall.³⁵

This identification of the perennial flaw underlying supposedly rational politics led Ibn Khaldūn and other fourteenth-century thinkers to dismiss imperial projects undertaken by regimes such as their own, ostensibly for the betterment of humanity at large, as instances of a misguided utopianism that pursues an ideal so very rare and remote as to be out of reach.³⁶ Indeed, the closest such ambitions had so far come to being fulfilled on earth, they contended, had been not through the actions of human beings, but rather through an inhuman force: the Black Death that in 1347 had moved from the Central Asian steppe into the Mediterranean. Originating in the “lands of the

³³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 68–69, 308–309; tr. Rosenthal 1: 89, 346; Kydonos, *On Despising Death* 15; see Tatakis 1956: 439–445.

³⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 68–69; 2: 126–128; tr. Rosenthal 1: 89; 2: 137–138.

³⁵ Metochites, *Semeioseis* 751, 756–757 (ed. Müller and Kiessling); Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 2: 255–257; tr. Rosenthal 2: 291–292.

³⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 2: 127; tr. Rosenthal 2: 138.

Scyths,” the plague had followed the same movement westwards as the nomads – and in a sense resembled them, preying on, mimicking, and taking over imperial structures, in the process displaying power more effectively than either Byzantium or Egypt. But the plague had progressed further still, achieving a dominion more encompassing and permanent than any of the nomadic tribes that had preceded it. Contemporaries noted that it was drawn toward urban settlements, entering “homes” and targeting those who were “residing within,” and gaining a purchase wherever a “dense and abundant” concentration of people offered itself up. Taking advantage of the weaknesses of a regime’s “later years,” the plague conquered and supplanted all existing authority. It established itself from the “Scyths” to the “Pillars of Hercules,” encircling “practically the whole inhabited world” and holding sway over the “major part of the population.”

Progressing from provinces to capital, the plague occupied administrative offices and worked its way into court and palace, eliminating politicians and bureaucrats, even toppling one heir to the throne. Indeed, disease itself sat in state “like a king on his throne,” as one observer put it, reigning over life and death, and deciding the fate of thousands in a day. At times it even seemed likely to carry out the ultimate ambition of an imperial ruler, which was to go “to Jerusalem” and carry out the sequence of rituals that would bring about the “end of the world.” Life not merely in the Mediterranean but also in the remainder of the “inhabited world” was being swept away. It was “as if the voice of existence in the world had called out for oblivion,” one observer wrote, and “the world had responded to its call.” As a pandemic, the disease was the epitome of civilization – civilization’s corruption made manifest and taken to its utmost extreme. It revealed imperialism’s alleged civilizing mission to be achievable solely in the form of a destruction so complete that it constituted global annihilation.³⁷

REFUGE IN RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE

Confronted with a prospect so bleak that it could best be called apocalyptic, one observer – Demetrios Kydonos – described himself as having developed symptoms of acute psychological distress:

It is already a year that I suffer from such dizziness and headaches that I feel as if my heart were bursting through my chest. I also suffer from breathlessness, as if about to suffocate, and from insomnia, which so torments me that it drives me almost to insanity.

³⁷ Gregoras, *Roman History*, v. 2, 797–798; John Kantakouzenos, *Histories*, v. 3, 48–52; Ibn Khaldūn, *Introduction* 1: 51–52; tr. Rosenthal 1: 64–65, 2: 135–137; Ibn al-Wardī, *Report on the Pestilence* 443–455. For the plague in Byzantium and the Islamic world, see Green 2014: 27–61; Derbes 1966: 179–182; Bartsocas 1966: 394–400; Miller 1976: 385–395; Dols 1977.

Such attacks, he added, only served to reinforce a “constant feeling of powerlessness.”³⁸ Another observer, the former emperor John Kantakouzenos, remarked that the “worst thing” about the situation “was the utter desperation.”³⁹

Succor was most often sought in religion. In the case of Ibn Khaldūn, this meant, as time went by, espousing the view that under Islam the world would be purified, and a durable order created whose “policies or political decisions” were supervised by “religious law” and whose “vision” was blessed with “divine light.” It also entailed entertaining a possibility he had previously discounted: that the problems of civilization might, after all, be solved by the descendants of “a nation of nomads and tent-dwellers who would dominate empires, overturn states and possess the greatest part of the world.”⁴⁰

On a diplomatic mission in 1401 to the camp of the army of the “Mongols and Tartars” advancing across the eastern Mediterranean, the by-then elderly Maghrebi received a series of audiences with the great conqueror, Tamerlane (Timur) that appear to have caused him to revise his previous thinking. Reminded that “power belongs to God,” who accords it to whom “he wills among his servants,” the author noted that the commander was a “favored man.” Under his leadership the Turko-Mongol confederation could rely on a special unity, arising from common adherence to the “only true faith,” that made it privy to resources of “solidarity” other conquering regimes had lacked. As a Muslim, Ibn Khaldūn contemplated Tamerlane’s advance positively: although the commander had not dispensed with the legacy of Genghis, he was also a recent convert to Islam – a co-religionist to whom gifts might be offered, such as an “elegant prayer rug” and copies of “the Qur’an beautifully bound in iron in one volume,” that symbolized key practices of religious instruction and observance. Such an understanding was facilitated by the fact Ibn Khaldūn already served a state that, although it maintained at court descendants of the Abbasids as puppet caliphs, was accustomed to the authority of sultans who had largely originated from within the ranks of palatine slave-soldiers (*mamluks*) of Turkic origin, and had long ago abandoned the shamanism of Central Asia in favor of the precepts of Islam. Perhaps Ibn Khaldūn chose to see in Tamerlane simply another version of these sultans and protectors.⁴¹

As Christians, the Byzantines could not hope to use such blandishments in dealing with the Ottomans, the other main encroacher of pagan

³⁸ Kydones, *Letters* 316 (ed. Tinnefeld). ³⁹ John Kantakouzenos, *Histories*, v. 3, 51.

⁴⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Autobiography* 351–383; tr. Cheddadi 216–247.

⁴¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *ibid.*, and *Introduction* 1: 72–73, 343–344; tr. Rosenthal 1: 92–93, 387; Ibn Arabshah, *Life of Tamerlane* 295–299; Fischel 1956: 91–99; Gibb 1933–1935: 23–31; Fromherz 2010: 7–10, 106–109.

nomadic origin that had adopted the Islamic faith during its migration westwards. Because religion did not constitute the common ground between the old and the new regimes in Asia Minor and the Balkans, interaction there with the incomers tended to be construed instead as a holy war in which no quarter could be given by either side. As the Byzantine elite faced the prospect of political marginalization and elimination, many from within its ranks rejected worldly concerns in favor of a preemptive withdrawal into personal introspection and spiritual life, preparing for heavenly salvation through the nurture of that “which is divine in us.” For some individuals, the human soul was to be cultivated through the study of philosophy and theology, while for others consolation was to be found in a form of meditation that encouraged one to search within one’s heart for the place where all powers of the soul are concentrated, and from there reach the immaculate truth and join with the divinity in ecstatic love. There were scholars among them, including Palamas and Barlaam (Massari), who deliberated whether God’s grace was necessary for salvation and speculated as to how it might operate. And a few, such as Plethon, may even have decided by the middle of the fifteenth century that they no longer believed in the one God. Members of diverse schools of thought, they came to be identified as “Stoics,” “Platonists,” or “Hesychasts” (quietists). But in their various ways all agreed that a man could transcend this mortal coil and achieve “deification” only by removing himself mentally – and, if need be, physically too – from his fellow human beings, for only then would he fear nothing and be free. As the religious thinker and mystic Palamas put it, advocating for a hermit’s life: “It is not possible to be with God and also to have much to do with people.”⁴²

⁴² Palamas, *Complete Works*, in *PG* 150:946, 1109, 1240, 1256; Gregory of Sinai, *Notice and On Prayer*, in *PG* 150:1308–1309, 1313–1316; John Kantakouzenos, *Against Barlaam*, in *PG* 154:695; Plethon, *Treatise of the Laws* 44–63, 130–239. For analysis, see Tatakis 2001: 217–254; Ierodiakonou 2002b: 219–236; Timko 1972: 326–338; Meyendorff 1974: 59–60; Williams 1977: 27–44; Sinkewicz 1982: 181–242; Anastos 1948: 183–305; Woodhouse, 1986: 62–78; Siniossoglou 2011: 1–38, 93–124, 327–408.

CHAPTER 37

PLETHON, SCHOLARIOS, AND THE BYZANTINE STATE OF EMERGENCY

NIKETAS SINOSSOGLOU

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN DOPPELGÄNGERS

The strife between George Gennadios “Scholarios” (c. 1400–1472) and George Gemistos “Plethon” (c. 1355–1452) presents itself in dramatic narrative form. As the Byzantine world was rapidly disintegrating, an influential religious leader (Scholarios) preaching at the heart of the Orthodox world, in illustrious Constantinople, publicly accused a lay philosopher (Plethon) operating at the fringes of the empire of surreptitious paganism. For years Scholarios had been collecting information on the “Hellenic” – that is, pagan – underground of Mistra, a Byzantine outpost in the Peloponnese that attained notoriety as a refuge for eccentric minds. Eavesdroppers reported to Scholarios about the existence of the *Book on the Laws* (henceforth *Nomoi*), a pagan holy book circulating among a chosen few, and Plethon’s aim to subvert Christianity and restore philosophical and religious Hellenism. For his part, Scholarios was more than just a devoted soldier of Christ: he was also an expert on Aristotle and was esteemed among the finest Orthodox theologians. Still, he failed to get to Plethon during the latter’s lifetime: the philosopher enjoyed some sort of immunity, possibly owing to his service as a valuable advisor of the despots of Mistra, and because he was a celebrated teacher of philosophy (as Scholarios was forced to admit), astronomer, geographer, historian, and jurist.

Plethon bridged the gap between Byzantium and the Renaissance. He had participated in the Council of Florence (1438–1439) as a delegate serving the Greek cause along with Scholarios, and Mark Eugenikos of Ephesos, the champion of the anti-Latin position and a man greatly admired by Scholarios, was among Plethon’s former students.¹ Plethon’s

¹ This chapter draws on Sinoissoglou 2011; 2012; 2014; 2016: 81–132. The bibliography on Plethon is diverse and rapidly expanding. On Plethon’s circle, see the masterful book by Masai 1956. Tambrun 2006 provides a solid analysis of Plethon’s Platonic philosophy. Woodhouse 1986 is still the most accessible monograph in English; on Plethon’s works and conversion to paganism, see Carabă 2010: 21–58; see also Neri 2010: 7–291. On the life and times of Scholarios, see especially Blanchet 2008; also Livanos 2006; Tinnfeld 2002. The main sources for the Plethon–Scholarios conflict (including Plethon’s *Nomoi*) were edited by Alexandre (1858). See also Scholarios’ *Epistle to the Princess of*

intellectual stature allowed him to meet and converse with the *crème de la crème* of Renaissance minds, including Nicholas of Cusa, Leonardo Bruni, and Cyriac of Ancona, who considered Plethon a friend. At the margins of the Council, Plethon compiled a treatise in Greek on the *Differences between Aristotle and Plato* that stirred up considerable controversy. It provoked Scholarios to protest against the veiled words of that cunning – as another Orthodox theologian of note, Manuel of Corinth, put it a little later² – crypto-pagan philosopher. It also began a long academic debate regarding the relation between Plato and Aristotle that variously involved Greek émigrés (Bessarion, George of Trebizond, Theodore of Gaza) as well as leading Italian philosophers.³ Thus, it was only after the fall of Constantinople and Plethon’s death that Scholarios, now upgraded by the Ottomans to the position of patriarch, finally took his revenge: he cast a copy of the *Nomoi* to the flames, most probably after 1455.⁴ His goal was not so much to make the malicious book disappear from the face of earth, he averred, but to punish its author. Scholarios was quick to add that anyone hiding a copy would be excommunicated, for he had evidence that the philosopher’s reveries of a repaganized world were contagious.⁵

It may be thought that Scholarios’ testimony reflected merely academic jealousy or a personal vendetta with Plethon. But Scholarios anticipates the objection, and knows a way to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Plethon’s religious apostasy was real and sincere: namely, he salvages for posterity parts of the condemned book.⁶ Perhaps over-confidently, Scholarios reasons that it is impossible for anyone to browse through the *Nomoi* and miss its authorial intent or explain it away as a mere literary game on Plethon’s part. This further assumes that one is taking philosophical and religious texts and ideas seriously. These pages were destined to have an underground afterlife, perhaps along with other copies of Plethon’s magnum opus, whose details we will probably never know.

Peloponnese concerning the Book of Gemistos (4.151–155); *Epistle to Manuel Raoul Oises* (4.476–489); *Letter to Exarch Joseph concerning the Book of Gemistos, and Against Hellenic Polytheism* (4.155–172); *On Our One and Tripartite God and Creator of All Beings, and against the Atheists or Automatists, and against Polytheists* (4.172–189). All references to works by Scholarios are to the edition by Petit, Siderides, and Jugie 1928–1936, by volume and page. For the Council of Florence, see Chapter 33.

² Manuel of Corinth, quoted in the “Notitia,” in *PG* 160:791–2: ὑπούλως . . . λεληθότως.

³ Lagarde 1973 (tr. Woodhouse 1986: 191–214); Bargelotes 1980. For aspects of Plethon’s legacy in the Renaissance see Khorkov 2014; Blum 2011; Tambrun 2010; Hankins 1990b.

⁴ Blanchet 2008: 191. Plethon’s recension and commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Recapitulation of Zoroastrian and Platonic Doctrines* were most probably parts of the single project condemned by Scholarios: Tambrun 1995: xiii.

⁵ Scholarios often referred to “automatists” and “polytheists,” suggesting that Plethon was not alone. His testimony is corroborated by a fellow theologian, Matthew Kamariotes. Cf. Scholarios, *Letter to Joseph* 4.171.34–7: οὐκ ἀφανισμοῦ μόνον χάριν, ἀλλὰ ποινηῆς εἰνεκα μάλιστα, δοθῆναι περὶ πεποιθήκαμεν τὸ βιβλίον; 4.172.3–10; *Letter to Oises* 4.476.31–477.2: συναποστατῶν καὶ φίλων. Cf. Kamariotes, *Two Orations on Plethon’s De fato*, ed. Reimarus 1721: 4.

⁶ Scholarios, *Letter to Joseph* 4.156.30–157.9; 171.37–172.2.

The dramatic quality of this story does not necessarily detract from its historicity. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, late Byzantium may be as fascinating as it appears. The most economic interpretation is to allow Plethon and Scholarios to have really been who our sources claim they were and who both persistently wanted to be: intellectuals engaged in an existential adventure beyond a merely anodyne “negotiation” of Aristotelian terms. Scholarios’ hunt for the deeper confessional core of the *Nomoi* was not a contingent effort begging for modern condescension. On the contrary, it epitomizes the unresolved tension experienced by intellectuals of his time when it came to that most problematic and unresolved strand of their cultural identity and life-experience: the reception of ancient philosophy and religion.

The present chapter will discuss Scholarios’ fixation with Plethon in terms of a pagan and Christian *Doppelgänger* theme. To begin with, both men claim a privileged access to an “ancient doctrine” (Scholarios: ἀρχαία δόξα / *archaia doxa*, πατριος θεολογία / *patrios theologia*; Plethon: πατριος δόξα / *patrios doxa*)⁷ and oppose Greek submission to Latin theology. Scholarios identifies this *doxa* with a centuries-old patristic tradition. Plethon opts for ancient Greek philosophy. Accordingly, both talk of a *genos* (people) to be saved. Scholarios thinks of this people as specifically and essentially Orthodox, while Plethon conceives of it in secular and proto-national terms, as the “Hellenes.” Consequently, their respective conceptualizations of the word *soteria* differ too. Scholarios understands it as a collective spiritual salvation to be attained by abiding to the tradition and practices of the Orthodox Church. Contrariwise, in Plethon’s *Memoranda* for the salvation of the Peloponnese the keyword *soteria* vigorously regains its Platonic meaning and is stripped of Christian soteriological significations.⁸ His *soteria* is the resilience and survival of a particular political entity, in fact, its *conservation* through the course of history (to adapt Cicero’s *conservare* in *De re publica*, an apt rendering of Plato’s *soteria*).⁹

The key to Scholarios’ political thought is the notion of *ecumene*, where the key to Plethon’s is that of a territorial space, specifically the Peloponnese as a rigidly defined χώρα (*chora*).¹⁰ For Scholarios, the geopolitical shift brought about by the Ottoman occupation is a matter indifferent – if not, indeed, auxiliary – to the *soteria* of the Orthodox *ecumene*, provided the relation between the believer and the Orthodox

⁷ Scholarios, *First Treatise on the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.17.15; *Letter to Joseph* 4.170.17; Plethon, *Nomoi*, ed. Alexandre 1858: 256.

⁸ Plethon, *Memorandum to Despot Theodore concerning the Peloponnese*, ed. Lampros 1930: 118.15, 129.12–13; Ἐπεὶ δ’ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου ἡμῖν ἔν γε τῷ παρόντι δεῖ ὡς σωτηρίας καὶ τοῦ σώζεσθαι.

⁹ Plato, *Republic* 465d; Cicero, *De re publica* 2.64.

¹⁰ Plethon, *Memorandum to Manuel Palaiologos*, ed. Lampros 1926: 247.10; 249.5–21.

Church remains unaltered and non-negotiable. For his part, Plethon makes *soteria* depend upon a necessary relation between a political community (*politeia*), its laws (*nomoi*), and territorial space (*chora*). He relates the salvation of an Orthodox *genos* not to a personal Judeo-Christian God, but to the rapid reconstitution and preservation of a terrestrial political community in the here and now. Space is power: *der Raum ist die Macht*, as the theorist of political theology Carl Schmitt put it, and boundaries are how humans shape their space and defy the erosions of time: “space is paradise; time is hell. Boundaries are magic.”¹¹

This hardly means that Scholarios renounced politics. On the contrary, it made a real difference to him whether the priests presiding over the ceremonies in Hagia Sophia would be Roman Orthodox or Roman Catholic, or both. He thereby opposed not only Plethon’s Platonism, but also those Latin sympathizers who advocated union and submission to the west in exchange for military and political aid. Scholarios and Plethon attributed different meanings to the self-same words: *doxa*, *genos*, *soteria* account for two conflicting understandings of time and history. Scholarios represents a collective Orthodox experience of life with historical roots extending deep within the world of late antiquity. Plethon’s idiosyncratic voice announces by contrast the typically modern value of individual responsibility.¹²

The distance between the projects of Plethon and Scholarios is replicated in the geopolitical distinction between Mistra and Constantinople, that is, between the Byzantine periphery and imperial center. As Scholarios put it, Constantinople was a spiritual “center.”¹³ Constantinople manifested the splendor and resilience of Orthodoxy and imperial power. Contrariwise, Mistra was a peripheral stronghold harboring deviant philosophical ideas long before Plethon,¹⁴ and it had recently been the seat of unusual revolutionary action. Approximately ten years before Plethon was born, a rebel named Lampoudios waged a small-scale war against John VI Kantakouzenos. According to John’s account, the rebellion combined a subversive sociopolitical agenda with nostalgia for a national antiquity, in particular the way “our forefathers related to freedom,” and it did so to challenge locally a declining imperial authority.¹⁵

¹¹ Schmitt 1991: 171; 187.

¹² See, for example, the tone that he assumes in his *Epistle to Emperor John Palaiologos*, ed. Lampros 1926: 312.25: ἐγὼ μὲν, τοῦμόν ἀποδιδούς ἃ βέλτιστα εἶναι μοι δοκεῖ . . . and *Mem. Man.* 265.8–20, where Plethon personally assumes responsibility for implementing the measures he proposes.

¹³ Scholarios, *Epistle on the Fall of Constantinople* 4.218.4: ὡς ἐκ τινος κέντρου, ἀρίστῳ παραδείγματι θείας τε καὶ πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς.

¹⁴ The pagan preacher Juvenalios, says Scholarios (*Letter to Oises* 4.479.18), “was aware that the Peloponnese was a most appropriate island for the planting of his evil seeds.”

¹⁵ Kantakouzenos, *Histories*, v. 3, 87: καὶ πόλεσιν ἀπάσαις καὶ κώμαις τὴν ἔθελουσιαν ὀνειδίζων, καὶ τὸ μὴ ἀξίως τῶν προγόνων ἐπὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν προθυμῆσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδα ἀνέχεσθαι ἄγεσθαι καὶ φέρεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ δεσπότητος.

Plethon's conceptual disambiguation of *doxa*, *soteria*, and *genos* was not the upshot of one man's musings; rather, it came about during a prolonged state of emergency that is itself philosophically noteworthy.

RIDE THE TIGER

Plethon and Scholarios clashed as the Byzantine empire was experiencing a perfect storm. Exhausted by civil strife and the outbreak of the Black Death, the Byzantines were hard pressed at sea by Genoa and Venice and on land by the Ottomans, Serbs, and Bulgarians. The shattered empire was in dire straits. As a historian put it in 1950, the death rattle of the Byzantines was extended only because the aggressors had their own internal issues to cope with and because certain westerners wanted to keep the Greek "*homme malade* in life, as a necessary factor for imposing their economic policy in the East."¹⁶

Peril and alarm are pregnant with political potential. In a state of emergency, new conceptions of history and sovereignty emerge. The tired sociopolitical order is annulled and its laws suspended, creating a breach in the continuum of history. This suspension of all norms often elicits exceptional and radical decision-making. In contemporary political philosophy, the surface of such an "autonomous moment of decision" is associated with Carl Schmitt's "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*) and Walter Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*, the epiphany of a here-and-now moment full of subversive possibility for novel political organizations.¹⁷ Written in a state of such emergency (ἐν μεγάλῳ κινδύνῳ / *en megalō kindyno*),¹⁸ Plethon's *Memoranda* are genuine specimens of a political philosopher experiencing such an exceptional moment. They expressly call on the despots of Mistra to acknowledge the possibility hiding in the Byzantine state of emergency: the despots should *immediately* take decisions and accomplish what is needed to reverse the "malady of current situation" (ἡ ἀσθένεια τῶν πραγμάτων / *he astheneia ton pragmaton*, τὸ παρὸν σχῆμα / *to paron schema*). They are to surge into the future and act "in a most timely manner" (καιριώτατα / *kairiotata*) by establishing an opportune form of political association, what Plethon calls the "most significant *politeia*." This leap, however, will not happen by itself: it requires correct action and exceptional decisions.¹⁹

Plethon's first *Memorandum* (c. 1416–1418) was addressed to the despot Theodore Palaiologos, and the second (c. 1418) to a Byzantine ruler who approximated the Platonic ideal of a philosopher-king: Manuel II

¹⁶ Dionysios Zakythenos, quoted in Baloglou 2011: 46.

¹⁷ Agamben 2005: 34; Löwy 2005: 105–116. ¹⁸ Plethon, *Mem. Theod.* 114.19; *Mem. Man.* 265.4.

¹⁹ Plethon, *Mem. Theod.* 129.20–4, 134.17–135.19; *Mem. Man.* 264.20–265.23; ψῆφον ἐξενεγκεῖν.

Palaiologos. These manifestos of decisionism and urgency are at odds with the rather tame genre of Byzantine “Mirrors for Princes.” They contain anything but standardized and commonplace advice. To begin with, they unabashedly turn against the gargantuan expansion of monasticism in an attempt to reverse the collateral shrinking of political authority. They effectively propose a reversion to the ancient Greek model of the *polis* and the abandonment of the Christian ideal of *ecumene*. As a result, Plethon breaks with the medieval tradition and announces two hallmarks of modernity.

First, the *Memoranda* daringly suggest that it is up to individuals to assume personal responsibility for realizing their *politeia*, rather than collectively anticipate a redemption through divine grace. The preservation and future of any political community is, moreover, defined by its choice of ideas, that is, by what we call ideology: τὰ δόγματα εἶναι τὰ κινούντα ἡμᾶς, it is our beliefs that move us, as Plethon aptly writes to his other former pupil Bessarion. Communities are tied together not so much by the revelation of an exclusive and presumably non-negotiable doctrine, as by competing ideas, beliefs, and versions of *politeia*. Beneficial or harmful, ideas define our being within history and allow us to align with historical shifts, to become one with *ananke*, we might say to ride the tiger: εἰ γὰρ τὰ δόγματα ἡμᾶς κινεῖ, σὺν ἀνάγκῃ δήπου καὶ κινεῖ.²⁰ It may well be, says Plethon in a work ostensibly targeting Latin theology, that ideas we thought were beneficial are in reality anything but that.²¹ By moving toward political ideology, Plethon parts from the voluntary acceptance of divine economy and favors a bilateral relation between the individual and history. *Ananke* amounts not to coercion and submission, but to the continuous preservation of life through the right choice of beliefs. Apparently, freedom occurs only as a violent epiphany of *ananke* in a world that will never know any redemption in the Judeo-Christian sense. This is the same *ananke* that, according to Thucydides, pushed the Athenians to ever enlarge their hegemony in order to preserve it, but which also eventually mobilized the Lacedemonians against them.²²

The polarity between Orthodox soteriology and Hellenic *ananke* is one between an extended spiritual empire defined by collective piety and

²⁰ Plethon, *Letter to Bessarion*, ed. in Mohler 1942: 462.

²¹ Plethon, *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*, ed. Alexandre 1858: 309 (οὐκ οἶε τὰ ἡμῖν λυσιτελεῖ δοκοῦντα καὶ διὰ τέλους λυσιτελεῖ, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ τῆς βλάβης αὐτὰ τὰ αἰτιώτατα κατέστη). See Dedes 2012: 427, who notes that this is not an anti-Latin but rather an anti-Christian pun. Orthodox contemporaries such as Scholarios and Manuel of Corinth immediately sensed that Plethon's discourse against the Latins could equally be read as a treatise against Christianity *in toto* (Siniosoglou 2011: 144). Large part of Scholarios' reply to Plethon is a refutation of paganism and clearly alludes to the *Nomoi* and the eventuality of that book “falling into our hands”: *Reply to Plethon concerning his Book against the Latins* 4.125.20–29.

²² Thucydides, *History* 1.24, 1.75.

a potentially fortified city-state defined by political initiative. Hence, whereas the transnational ideal of Hesychasm absorbed the existing political structures of the Byzantine empire, Plethon asked for the fortification of the borders of the Peloponnese and the creation of a bounded state that we might call secular, insofar as it isolated monastic communities and allowed only for priests of an unnamed, political religion. Plethon also demands an extensive program of sociopolitical engineering. The population is divided into three *gene*. The responsibility of both the army and agriculture is conferred upon the citizens who periodically alternate their roles as guardians of the *politeia* and cultivators. Contrary to common Byzantine practice, the two activities should never coincide but complement each other, boosting the military sense of dignity and honor. Mercenary troops are condemned: how lamentable is the leader, says Plethon, who ruins his citizens economically and then hires mercenaries to save them.²³ The most radical measure concerns the abolition of private property and the redistribution of land. The decisive factor is the varying human ability to cultivate a given piece of land: anyone may cultivate land, provided the maximization of production is ensured. Plethon advocates not the communal ownership of land, but the common *use* of land. If one cultivator fails, then the state intervenes and redistributes the property. The right to land ownership depends upon labor and productivity.²⁴ Echoing Plato's abolition of family ties among the guardians, Plethon wants to end the economic and psychological attachment of lords to their inherited lands. In place of family tradition, Plethon introduces the unity of the people (*genos*).

Plethon anticipates the transition from a medieval paradigm to a modern one by recognizing ideological reform as the definitive motive force of history. His passage from the multinational and Roman Byzantine empire to a protonational political community is encapsulated in an often quoted line from the *Memorandum to Manuel*: Ἔσμεν γὰρ . . . Ἕλληνες τὸ γένος, ὡς ἦ τε φωνὴ καὶ ἡ πάτριος παιδεία μαρτυρεῖ, that we are Greeks by *genos* is established by our language and our ancestral culture.²⁵ Manuel rules over Hellenes, rather than a Roman Orthodox *genos*.

Some scholars trace the birth of western nationalism to the conflict of national definitions (*nationes*) that broke out during the Council of Constance (1414–1418), as well as to Renaissance humanism. In this sense, Plethon's *Memoranda* coincide with the emergence of nationalism in the west.²⁶ They satisfy modern definitions of a national outlook,

²³ Plethon, *Mem. Man.* 252.18–20.

²⁴ On Plethon and Plato on property, see Garnsey 2007; 2009. On the Spartan and Italian influences upon Plethon's reformism, see Shawcross 2013.

²⁵ Plethon, *Mem. Man.* 247.14–15. ²⁶ Hirschi 2012; Siniossoglou 2014.

including the reterritorialization of geographical borders; an appeal for political sovereignty; new political institutions; application of national denominations; a national army; economic self-sufficiency and reorganization of agricultural production; and the critical appraisal of the religious establishment. Whereas proto-nationalism in the west appeared in circumstances of intellectual and cultural renaissance, in Byzantium the same concept came to the foreground amidst the empire's death throes.

Significantly, some of Plethon's students and copyists active in Mistra identified themselves in terms other than "Roman," such as "Lacedemonians" or "Spartans," and even proceeded to adopt classicizing versions of their names: Chalkokondyles, the historian of the fall of Constantinople, changed his name from Nikolaos to Laonikos;²⁷ and Hieronymos Charitonimos assumed the cognomen Hermonimos. In his funeral oration for Plethon, Hermonimos announces the fate that awaited individual Greek scholars after the death of their teacher and the imminent fall of Mistra: now, he says, "we lovers of letters shall be scattered to the ends of the ecumene" (διασπαρησόμεθα τε οἱ λόγων ἑρασταὶ ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς οἰκουμένης ἑσχάτιάν).²⁸ Some years after the fall, Michael Apostoles – another scholar connected to this circle – described himself in exile as a man without a home: ἄπολις (*apolis*), ἄπατρις (*apatris*), πένης (*penes*), ἀγύρτης (*agyrtes*).²⁹ This theme of exile culminated in the "heroic love" (*amor hereos*) of Marullus Tarcaniota, the Greek soldier-poet of the Renaissance, whose pagan hymns and nostalgia for a pagan and quasi-mystical homeland belong to the same constellation as Plethon's *Nomoi*.³⁰ The intellectual history of these men directly or indirectly linked to Plethon has only now begun to be written.³¹ Their individual experience of loss, homelessness, and alienation – as an Italian said of Marullus, he was a *Graeculus* entering *in alienam provinciam* – contrasts sharply with Plethon's urgent call to the despots of Mistra to strictly define the territorial space of an exceptional political community.

How utopian are the *Memoranda*? There are striking analogies between them and More's *Utopia*. A man such as Erasmus of Rotterdam might have served as the channel of ideas between Plethon and More.³² Besides, from a philosophical perspective Plethon appears "utopian" *avant la lettre*, for he does not consider anchoring his hopes in the historical and accomplished event bearing the greatest significance to Christians – the Incarnation of Jesus Christ – but sails off to the unknown waters of the future, toward what the philosopher of utopia, Ernst Bloch, called "the not-yet-Being"

²⁷ On Laonikos and Plethon, see Kaldellis 2014b. ²⁸ Alexandre 1858: 386.

²⁹ Laourdas 1953: 516–527.

³⁰ On Marullus and Plethon, see Siniosoglou (forthcoming a) and 2016: 133–178.

³¹ Lamers 2015. ³² Garnsey 2009: 339.

(*das noch-nicht Sein*). In fact, the *Nomoi* breaks off in an encomium of the future (τὸ μέλλον / *to mellon*) incited by an ability specific and peculiar to the future alone: being as not-yet-Being.³³ On the other hand, the hazy sociopolitical circumstances of emergency make it hard for us after the fact to speculate as to what was, after all, “possible” and what not. From where Plethon was standing, the time was more than ripe for his proposals. “The *politeia* I have in mind,” he says, “is neither unrealizable nor difficult to approximate, provided we collectively act as if moved by a single soul” (ἐπὶ μιᾷ ψυχῇ / *epi mia psyche*).³⁴ Plethon believed that his measures were closer to the historical *kairos* than was the tired and dying socioeconomic construct of his time.

His confidence is in itself interesting. It appears understandable in the light of Nicholas Kabasilas’ testimony that radical ideas were in the air before Plethon.³⁵ Kabasilas records the most violent clash of philosophical arguments in Byzantine intellectual history. The shadowy officials refuted by Kabasilas (their relation to the Zealot rebellion in Thessalonike, 1342–1350, is debatable) argued that each historical cycle required its own proper laws – and that it was time to exit the cycle of Orthodoxy in search of novel political ideals. These lay officials persistently asked for the confiscation of monastic lands, the reorganization of the army, a new tax system, and, in a nutshell, socioeconomic regeneration, on the grounds that the Christian idea of law was no longer dominant – it had completed its course. Just as Jesus Christ had once put an end to the laws he found in place, now was the right moment to substitute “our laws” for those of Christ.³⁶ As they saw it, religion was not the product of revelation, but the product of sociopolitical circumstance.

Contrariwise, men such as Kabasilas and Scholarios subscribed to an evolutionary rather than circular view of ideas and history, and approached the “ancient doctrine” of Orthodoxy as continuously reaffirmed by all Fathers from late antiquity to the times of Mark Eugenikos. In the same vein as the pupils of Gregory Palamas, Scholarios asked for full submission to divine will, even if that entailed the Ottoman occupation as divine punishment. His points of reference are Augustinian: what else is any terrestrial polity other than a preparation for the divine polity in the best case, or, in the worst case, yet another iteration of a morally and spiritually rotten Babylon? The destruction of earthly political communities is the

³³ Plethon, *Nomoi* 260: τὸ δὲ μέλλον . . . εἰ οὐδέ πω καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐν, διὰ τὸ ἔσεσθαι ποτε, τοῦ οὐκέτι ἔσομένου μᾶλλον γ’ ἂν εἴη, ὥστε καὶ ἄμεινον εἴη ἂν.

³⁴ Plethon, *Mem. Theod.* 130.4–5.

³⁵ Nicholas Kabasilas, *Λόγος περὶ τῶν παρανόμως τοῖς ἄρχουσι ἐπὶ τοῖς ἱεροῖς τολμωμένων*, ed. Ševčenko 1957: 81–171. For a comparison between Plethon’s measures and those discussed in Kabasilas’ discourse, see Siniosoglou 2011: 359–361.

³⁶ Kabasilas, *Discourse* 31.8–11, ed. Ševčenko 1957: 107–108, 133–134.

work of divine economy. Who dares to prolong the former and delay the passage to the latter? Salvation issues not from powers innate to man, nor from man's stubborn preference for secular values, but only from divine grace occurring within the realm of the Church. "If we succeed at reaching the eternal fatherland, we shall hardly grieve about the passions of our [terrestrial] sojourn," states one of Scholarios' prayers.³⁷

This outlook explains Scholarios' choices on the eve of the fall. On 12 December 1452, a grand ceremony was led jointly by Orthodox and papal clergy in Hagia Sophia, followed by a public reading of the decrees of the Council of Ferrara-Florence. Protesting against this "innovation," Scholarios withdrew to his cell, where he remained praying as the *Sternstunde* of Constantinople's fall rapidly approached and the Ottomans were at the gates. In the same vein as the contemporary historian Doukas, Constantine Sathas (d. 1914) described Scholarios as "a traitor" to his people who theologically authorized the imminent disaster as the rightful vengeance of God.³⁸ In reality, Scholarios' withdrawal from the public scene and break from the Byzantine political community was an honest expression of his answer to that self-same question tantalizing Plethon: what should one do in that most exceptional and urgent state of affairs?

FROM UTOPIA TO HERESY

It is a philosophical commonplace that man is a social animal. But upon closer scrutiny, man is a schismatic animal too: utopias and sects allow individuals to manifest their natural antinomian tendency at the cost of parting from their community.³⁹ No other Byzantine manifested this potential the way Plethon did. The failure of the *Memoranda* to persuade the Palaiologoi to build and fortify a self-sufficient city-state in the Peloponnese was followed by a more introverted plan: to organize a secret brotherhood (*phratría*) able to mould its religious, intellectual, and political identity from scratch. The *Nomoi* appears to have been a holy book authorizing members of a guild (of *ἑταῖροι* / *hetairoi* and *φράτορες* / *phratores*) to move *eo ipso* beyond the Byzantine political establishment in search of alternative forms of existential commitment and allegiance. It was now up to a few, rather than the whole social body, to realize the most apt and opportune *politeia*. The process was to begin secretly, not publicly announced. In this sense the *Nomoi* recall Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws*, where the highest type of philosophy is restricted to factions of philosopher-rulers and law-givers while the majority of citizens are excluded from

³⁷ Scholarios, *Public Prayer* 4.355.28–30 (εἰ μέλλοιμεν τῆς πατρίδος ἐπιτυγχάνειν τῆς αἰδίου, οὐδὲν ἡμᾶς λυπήσει τὰ πάθη τῆς παροικίας).

³⁸ Zeses 1980: 185. ³⁹ Cioran 1995: 1039.

comprehending the Good. The relations among the various parts of the *Nomoi*, so different in tone and intention, reflect that disquieting Platonic turn from Socrates' loose ideal of a philosophical life realizable by all through examination and *elenchos* to the exclusive "Nocturnal Council" of the *Laws*, responsible for supervising education and enforcing a penal system.

In what sense were Plethon's students identifiable with the *phratores* of the *Nomoi*? It is impossible to establish the exact relation between the secret brotherhood envisaged in the *Nomoi*⁴⁰ and Plethon's actual circle. First, Plethon was at once teaching a diverse body of Christian students and maintaining an esoteric circle. Thus, Hermonymos Charitonimos testified to the existence of an inner circle while lamenting his exclusion from it.⁴¹ Michael Apostoles, who had to sign a "Confession of Faith" addressed to Constantine Palaiologos in order to clear his "faith" from "suspicions" of paganism,⁴² and the sun-worshiper Demetrios Raoul Kavakes (who described himself as a "Spartan" but also a "Hellene"), should probably be counted among Plethon's "chorus of pupils" (as the former put it).⁴³ And there is evidence that Plethon's teaching materials (his *παρεκβολαί* / *parekbolai* or *παρὰσημειώσεις* / *parasemeioseis*), his textual emendations to Plato, and even the classical works copied in Mistra, were directly relevant to his ideological concerns and pagan theology.⁴⁴ Still, formally speaking Plethon was lecturing a Christian audience. The esoteric ingroup was tightly covered in a veil of Christian excellence. Second, according to Scholarios' testimony Plethon's paganism did not acquire a militant, proselytizing, or aggressive aspect – with the exception of the renegade pagan preacher Juvenalios, who may have operated on his own initiative until he was arrested, tortured, and executed.⁴⁵ Plethon employed a policy of ideological preparation and dissimulation (Scholarios called it *lanthanein*), waiting for history and destiny (*heimarmene*) to collide, perhaps circulating parts of the *Nomoi* to test the waters.

When exactly did Plethon conceive the idea of a Platonist guild? An eyewitness at the Council of Florence, George of Trebizond, quoted

⁴⁰ The lengthy guidelines regarding the actual practice (χρήσεως διάταξις) of pagan hymns, prayers, and calendar (*Nomoi* 228–240) make sufficiently clear that Plethon had a real brotherhood in mind. See also *Nomoi* 198: σύνοικοί τε ἡμῶν καὶ σύντροφοί, ὧ φράτορες τε καὶ ἄλλοι οἰκεῖοι.

⁴¹ Hieronymos Charitonimos, *Hymnody for Wise Teacher Gemistos Plethon*, ed. Alexandre 1858: 375–386.

⁴² Michael Apostoles, *Address to Emperor Constantine Palaiologos*, ed. Lampros 1930: 4.83–87.

⁴³ Woodhouse 1986: 224. On Kavakes, see Lamers 2015: 44–45.

⁴⁴ See Dedes 2012: 424–426, 449–453, for an edition of Plethon's *parekbolai*. For Plethon's textual emendations, see Pagani 2008: 40–45. Cf. Dedes 1981: 77, for the suggestion that the equivalent of a "pagan *Philokalia*" was collected and copied in Plethon's inner circle.

⁴⁵ Scholarios, *Epistle to Oises* 4.479.19–23; on the case of Juvenalios, see Medvedev 1991; Siniossoglou 2011: 134–138.

Plethon as predicting the imminent rise of a new religion: “the entire world,” said Plethon, “would assume the same religion, with one mind and one preaching.” “Would this be Christ’s or Mohammed’s?” George asked, to which Plethon replied, “Neither, but one that does not differ from paganism.”⁴⁶ This makes 1439 the *terminus ante quem* Plethon seriously contemplated the project of a pagan religion. Scholarios implies as much when noting that the need to refute Plethon’s *Differences between Aristotle and Plato* was anything but the upshot of a trivial academic controversy: “the battle does not concern only Aristotle and truth, but our very self.”⁴⁷ The disagreement over Aristotle and Plato covered a deeper one over truth and error, by extension between the Orthodox tradition and a novel pagan–Platonic hybrid.⁴⁸

It was on this occasion that Plethon and Scholarios first locked horns. Combined with an unmoving existential commitment to patristic theology, Scholarios’ knowledge of ancient philosophy enabled him to read between the lines of Plethon’s *Differences*. He reminds us that “Aristotle deviated from truth in fewer points than Plato, which explains why pagan philosophers such as Plotinos, Proklos, and Porphyry had a preference for Plato.”⁴⁹ Plethon’s plan was to authorize pagan innovation by rendering obsolete the prime philosophical authority recognized by Orthodoxy. By showing himself capable of exposing the errors of even the “wisest man of all,” Aristotle, he was claiming for himself a position of absolute authority in theological and philosophical matters.⁵⁰ Scholarios also acutely noted that the endless theological controversies created the perfect cover for Plethon’s paganism, at the same time as they threw grist to the mill: “the confusion in ecclesiastical matters” does not allow one to “appreciate that the arrogance of Hellenism propagated by some has its roots in [precisely] that confusion.” What really worried him was the inability of contemporaries to relate the two intellectual phenomena: Hellenism and theological tumult.⁵¹ And he was right: beside the dispute with the Latins, the accusation of heresy and “paganism” was in the air since the beginning of the Hesychast controversy. Byzantine intellectuals repeatedly discussed, reiterated, and compared the ideas of Proklos to

⁴⁶ George of Trebizond, *Comparatio* 3.21.

⁴⁷ Scholarios, *Against Plethon’s Questions concerning Aristotle* 4.5.36–6.1: ἄμα δὲ καὶ οὐχ ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοτέλους μόνον καὶ ἀληθείας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ὁ πόλεμος ἔσται.

⁴⁸ For modern readers who agree with Scholarios that a preference between Plato or Aristotle concerns more than academic disputes, it is of special interest that, as a rule, those Greek intellectuals who sojourned in the west after 1453 shared a strong inclination to Neoplatonism, whereas many who proved easily assimilable to the Ottoman status quo favored Aristotle. See Balivet 1999.

⁴⁹ Scholarios, *Against Plethon* 4.4.32–36. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 4.8.5–7.

⁵¹ Scholarios, *Dialogue on the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 3.34: Ὁ δὲ χεῖρόν ἐστιν, ὅτι μηδὲ τὸν ὑποτιφόμενον ἐν τισιν ἑλληρισμὸν συνοραῖς ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συγχύσεως τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰληφότα.

Orthodoxy in order to indict each other with the fallacies of “polytheism” and “Hellenism.” By surrounding the option of Hellenism with terror, they unwittingly perpetuated it as an option; then, political confusion could incite someone to see it in a positive light. Confusion was the midwife of heresy.

To appreciate Scholarios’ reaction to Plethon we need to directly address the former’s attitude to Greek philosophy and the ancient thought-world. “All Christians” (Χριστιανοὶ πάντες) study ancient Greek texts “at the level of speech” alone, he wrote against Plethon, that is, for the purpose of learning Greek: ἔνεκα τοῦ κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν Ἑλληνισμοῦ. But now Plethon deviated from his Orthodox community and, like Julian the Apostate, subscribed to pagan teachings.⁵² Scholarios was himself proficient in the technicalities of Aristotelian philosophy. We learn from an epistle to Constantine Palaiologos that he had studied Aristotle and Theophrastos, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Syrianos, Simplicios, Philoponos, Psellos, the Latin scholastics, Averroes, and Avicenna. Like Plethon, he too was a teacher, and his writings possess a self-confessed curricular value.⁵³ His work on Aristotle does not programmatically claim to advance any groundbreaking interpretation; rather, it is defined by its technical and paideutic scope, comprised of abridgements and selected comments, that is, of notes intended for *anagnoseis*, or lectures. As Theodore Zeses writes, Scholarios was so fully immersed in the tradition of the eastern Fathers of the Church, from the Cappadocians to Mark Eugenikos, that he was happy to abandon Aristotle to the Latins when it came to the innovation that he authorized: ὁ σὸς Ἀριστοτέλης, “your Aristotle,” as the Orthodox “Palaitimos” (“Old-Fashioned Honour”) indignantly says to “Neophron” (“Childish in Spirit”), the imaginary spokesman of Latin theology. Scholarios “rarely writes in order to vent personal theological worries; his discourses stem from the need to support Orthodox doctrine.”⁵⁴ To be sure, Scholarios esteemed Thomas Aquinas;⁵⁵ but he was conscious of the insurmountable differences between Latin and Orthodox theology and quick to stress the two major ones: the *filioque* and the distinction between divine essence and energies. Catholic theologians have sometimes sought to appropriate Scholarios, yet it is quite clear that “almost the whole of his theological work evolved in opposition to Latin scholastic theology” and that, in fact, he should be classified alongside authors in the Palamite tradition.⁵⁶

⁵² Scholarios, *Letter to the Princess* 4.152.30–37. See also *Letter to Joseph* 4.160.29–30: μέχρι τοσούτου τὴν περὶ τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸν ἐκτείνας σπουδὴν . . . ὅτι μὴ μόνον τὴν λέξιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ψυχὴν τὴν οἰκείαν οὕτω διενεώθη κοσμεῖν.

⁵³ Scholarios, *Letter to Constantine Palaiologos* 7.2.28–4.25; Zeses 1980: 351.

⁵⁴ Zeses 1980: 412–413. ⁵⁵ See Chapter 32. ⁵⁶ Zeses 1980: 348, 411–412.

This is important because the sharp distinction between school Aristotelianism (here represented by Scholarios) and the possibility of a dangerous personal identification with the *nous* (or mind) of Aristotle's philosophy had already been carefully made by Palamas against Barlaam of Calabria, and is also featured in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*. As Palamas knew, its roots went back to Cappadocian theology.⁵⁷ In a nutshell, Scholarios was a fine example of Byzantine "curricular philosophy" or "school philosophy,"⁵⁸ as opposed to Plethon's deviant philosophical experimentations.

TWO PRINCIPLES OF PAGANISM

The *Nomoi* are invigorated by a Neoplatonic principle which we could call the principle of antecedent truth: truth necessarily possesses causal and ontological priority over error, just as benefit does over harm, and health over sickness. To become sick, one first needs to be healthy. Accordingly, true doctrines cannot but precipitate their experientially attested corruption. This principle offers a criterion for distinguishing between the truly "wise men" and the innovators or "sophists," who are always prone to "negotiate everything (ἅπαντα πραγματεύονται / *apanta pragmateuontai*)" out of vainglory and love of power.⁵⁹ Given that the Orthodox empire was not in a position to halt the approaching disaster, one ought to search deeper and beyond Orthodoxy for those "healthy ideas" (αἱ ὑγιεῖς δόξαι / *hai hygieis doxai*) that were necessary to avoid the impending disaster.⁶⁰ True doctrine was coeval with the universe, rather than linked to individual teachers and philosophies. Zarathustra, that archetypal figure of the wise man, could indeed serve as an ἐξηγητὴς παλαιότατος (*exegetes palaiotatos*) of that self-same philosophy reverberated by Plato; but Zarathustra was not its initiator, for truth was a constituent element of the world itself.⁶¹

Contrary to the late Plato and the Gnostics, who were perplexed by the seemingly unavoidable and ineradicable presence of evil in nature and politics, Plethon located the real problem elsewhere: in the accretion of successive levels of misappropriated ideas during the advance of history. Humanity is not crooked by itself but becomes so due to a historical

⁵⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Epistle 1 against Barlaam* (καθ' ἑλληνικῆς ἐπιτομῆς) 51 and 54, ed. Perrella 2006: 494; ὁ γὰρ θύραθεν νοῦς οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 16.

⁵⁹ Cf. Plethon, *Nomoi* 28, 33–34, 244, 258. These "sophists" are credited with typically Christian beliefs; Siniosoglou 2011: 158.

⁶⁰ Plethon, *Nomoi* 258; Siniosoglou 2011: 158.

⁶¹ Plethon, *Nomoi* 252. This idea is central to Suhrawardi's philosophy of Illumination; see Siniosoglou 2011: 179–180.

development full of marred and misused meaning. The *Nomoi* optimistically assume that this corrosive process is reversible. In the *Memoranda*, the *soteria* of the *genos* depends upon a reversal of the political degeneration that led from the ancient *polis* to the Orthodox *ecumene*. Analogously, in the *Nomoi* truth depends on the reversal of the process that allegedly led from a polytheist Hellenic worldview to Christian monodoxy. The secular political religion and proto-nationalism of the *Memoranda* gives way to a hybrid of traditionalism and utopianism.

A second principle informs the *Nomoi* project: the more one detaches oneself from a degenerating present, the deeper one reaches within one's self and an arcane tradition and the higher one approximates *politeia*. As existing boundaries were being liquidated, Plethon thought to recover his (real or imaginary) space by alienating himself from that lamentful present and performing an *anachoresis*, or inner immigration. In Carl Schmitt's words, "I lose my time and win my space."⁶²

Thus, any theologian of Scholarios' caliber could not help noticing that there was much more at stake in the *Nomoi* than an invitation to ritual paganism. The *Nomoi* went beyond the undefined political religion of the *Memoranda* and excluded Christianity as a mode of existence, while claiming another. For example, Orthodox theology assumes a godhead that is absolutely free: God is not only a neutral "moving immovable" principle in the Aristotelian sense, but also an active cause of divine love. Contrariwise, in the *Nomoi* Plethon reverts to the Hellenic idea of *heimarmene*: the universe and all Being is a well-tuned and preconfigured system evolving in a way "not to be diverted" (*aparatreptos*), which leaves little room for interventions and initiatives by an otherworldly and personal God. Such an "automatic" world reverberated Plato's concerns in the *Timaeus* and Stoic philosophy, which called for individual and collective attunement to reason, rather than for attentively receiving divine grace. Plethon's reception of *heimarmene* goes further and diverges from late antique Neoplatonic authorities, where the latter might be shown to potentially agree with Orthodoxy.⁶³ Moreover, Plethon's parting from Orthodoxy led to his assumption of a perpetually renewed world, rather than one created *ex nihilo*.⁶⁴ Crucially, the *Nomoi* provocatively cancels the non-negotiable core Orthodox distinction between created matter and uncreated essence. In its place, Plethon introduces the continuous, organic, and hierarchic ἀνάπτυξις (*anaptyxis* or unfolding) of Being. Far from being imparticipable like the supra-essential Christian God, Plethon's "Zeus" manifests in a process of self-specification that accounts for the biological kinship between all divinities that directly or indirectly emanate from Zeus / Being / One. And contrary to the Trinitarian conception of God,

⁶² Schmitt 1991: 187, 171. ⁶³ Bene 2014: 64–68. ⁶⁴ Granada 2014: 341–375.

the *Nomoi* postulates the unity of the divine and Being: its theology is henotheist in the tradition of Plotinos, Julian, and Proklos, assuming that “god is one and god is many,” that is, the plurality of divinities diversely expand aspects of the one God.⁶⁵ “Zeus” is allegedly present in each god as is the monad in all subsequent numbers, which are taken to emanate from him through a finite process of division.⁶⁶

The corresponding hymns resemble those of Proklos and function at the level of exoteric religion, or *Alltagsreligion*. Yet the philosophically aware reader will recognize Plato’s Forms here: the first five gods are identifiable with the *megista gene* of Plato’s *Sophist* (the “major categories” of being, identity, difference, motion, and rest), whereas other divinities assume responsibility as causal principles exercising partial or specific authority over the world of Being. The symbolic theology of the *Nomoi* amounts to a system of hierarchical and deterministic organization of causes (σύστημα / *systema*) that is also a unified organism in a perpetual state of creation and evolution. There is no freedom without *ananke*, or else freedom amounts to man’s harmonization with a system of causes.⁶⁷

Obviously, the ensuing idea of history excludes belief in Christocentric soteriology and in the eschatological movement of history. Plethon invests in an anthropocentric optimism that extends to the point of comprehending the divine according to man’s innate powers. Scholarios protested that according to “a work of Plethon’s” (most probably *Nomoi*, book 1) Plethon declared that “truth can be found only by human discursive reason by means of philosophy,” and that he considered “all talk of ‘inspirations’ and revelations” as deception.⁶⁸ Indeed, in the *Nomoi* Plethon recommends a comparative examination of “common notions” provided to all people “or at least to the superior kind of men” in order to retrieve their underlying propositions and opt for the best way of life. Here Plethon elaborates on Aristotle’s method of reasoning ἐξ ἐνδόξων (*ex endoxon*), that is, generally approved opinions, but one can also sense echoes of Stoic epistemology and Plato’s call in the *Phaedo* to “adopt the best and most irrefutable of men’s theories and sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft.”⁶⁹ Eventually, human *theoria* culminates in the “intellection of Zeus,” just as does the contemplative activity of the gods.⁷⁰ This version of pagan epistemic optimism anticipates Renaissance and Enlightenment

⁶⁵ Proklos, *Platonic Theology* 3.14.4; Plotinos, *Ennead* 5.8.9.15–20; on the term henotheism, see Siniosoglou 2010c.

⁶⁶ Plethon, *Nomoi* 94. ⁶⁷ Plethon, *Nomoi* 74, 68–70.

⁶⁸ Cf. Scholarios, *Against Plethon* 4.16.31–4; *Nomoi* 42; Siniosoglou 2011: 166.

⁶⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Topics* 100a18–21; Plato, *Phaedo* 85c–d. Gregory Palamas had shown the purported limitations of the Greek method of reasoning *ex endoxon* and argued, against the anti-Hesychasts, that the sentences of Patristic wisdom possessed value on their own account (αὐτόπιστοι) and not by comparison: see Gregory Palamas, *Second Letter to Akindynos* 29, ed. Perrella 2006: 464.

⁷⁰ Plethon, *Nomoi* 246 (3.43.70–78).

humanism by respecting the hidden potential of human faculties: human souls periodically unite with mortal bodies “so that the communion and union of mortal nature in us contributes to the binding together of the All.”⁷¹ Man is a *methorion* – an *amphibious* being between mortality and eternity, as Plotinos put it, or a *copula mundi*, as Ficino and Pico della Mirandola later redeployed the same idea.

Plethon did not belong to the medieval world and was announcing a new one. Still, Scholarios emphatically noted that Plethon’s ideas were not at all peculiar to him, nor at all novel. They formed an integral part of a life-experience and intellectual thought-world at odds with Christianity that was ostensibly in a dormant state since Julian’s time. How then did he explain Plethon’s apostasy? According to Scholarios, Plethon was converted to Hellenism in Ottoman territory by a shadowy Jewish follower of Zoroaster named Elissaios. Such a teacher might have been the carrier of ideas mediated by followers of Suhrawardi, Kabbalists, and Sufis. At that time, Bursa and Adrianople were transcultural religious crossroads fostering syncretism and the fusion of esoteric currents, and belief in intermediary beings was widespread in early rabbinic and extra-rabbinic Jewish tradition. Regardless of the question of Elissaios’ precise identity, there is no reason to doubt the testimony regarding Plethon’s sojourn, insofar as (a) we possess no alternative or conflicting account regarding Plethon’s formative years and Plethon himself admits to having studied “with the most wise of the Italians and the Jews”;⁷² (b) Plethon related the efficiency of Ottoman expansionism to Islamic religiosity (as opposed to what he saw as Orthodox defeatism), a connection implying his acquaintance with the political reception of Islam;⁷³ (c) his henotheism fits well within an esoteric nexus encompassing Rumelia, the Peloponnese, and the Aegean, spanning confessional identities and territorial borders and employing sect as the vehicle of utopianism. For example, like Plethon’s *phratores*, the “Brethren of Purity” of al-Bistami, Sheikh Bedreddin, and Börklüce Mustafa hoped to regain a supra-confessional religious law as the precondition for constructing a novel political identity.⁷⁴ According to Scholarios, Plethon resurfaced in Constantinople and indulged in a play of religious dissimulation. As Matthew Kamariotes put it, Plethon “led the life of the hare” (λαγῶ βίον ἔζη).⁷⁵ Eventually, Plethon was either exposed and forced to

⁷¹ Plethon, *Nomoi* 266.

⁷² Plethon, *Against Scholarios concerning Aristotle*, ed. Maltese 1988: 4.27–29.

⁷³ See Dedes 2012: 440–1 and 450 for an edition of Plethon’s *parekbole* regarding the ἀραβάρχησις καὶ νομοθέτης Muhammad.

⁷⁴ Siniosoglou 2012: 38–55.

⁷⁵ Matthew Kamariotes, *Two Orations* 218. Scholarios harps on the motif of dissimulation and veiled language, e.g. *Letter to the Princess* 4.154.33–34: Οὐ γὰρ ἀπ’εὐθείας κατὰ τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἀληθείας ἐπιχειρεῖ, ἀλλὰ πлагίως, τῇ βεβαιώσει, ὡς ἐνόμιζε, τοῦ ἑλληνισμοῦ.

move to the outpost of Mistra, as Scholarios says, or appointed there to advise the young Palaiologoi. Be that as it may, Mistra suited his purposes well.

OF BOUNDARIES AND DARKNESS

This chapter has argued that the clash between Plethon and Scholarios was one of opposed intellectual self-definitions and modes of existence. At any rate, that is how it was experienced by the two men. The more precise the philosophical questions asked, the more do their respective replies differ: is God intra- or extra-mundane? Are there limits to man's cognitive potential? What is the political significance of one's commitment to the Hellenic or the Orthodox theological paradigm? The difference between the two men is deeply rooted in the ambiguity, suspicion, and fear haunting the Orthodox relation to the ancient Hellenic thought-world since the time of Julian and the Cappadocians.

From a historian's perspective, it may be objected that Mark Eugenikos, the man greatly admired by Gennadios Scholarios as a teacher and genuine heir of the eastern Fathers, was a student of Plethon's; and that two of the most fascinating Orthodox Christians of the period immediately following the collapse of Byzantium, Isidore of Kiev (c. 1385–1463) and Maximos Graikos (1470–1556), were directly or indirectly linked to Plethon's school. Isidore remained in touch with his teacher and fought in the dramatic siege of Constantinople, while Maximos (Michael Trivoles), the man who left Florence for Mount Athos, was a student of John Moschos, the successor of Plethon at the school of Mistra, and probably a relative of the "Spartan" Demetrios Trivoles, a student of Plethon's and copier of Plotinos' *Enneads*. Such complicated personal and intellectual networks supersede the religious, ideological, and philosophical affiliation of each one of them. After all, history is a continuous *osmosis*.

This is, formally speaking, correct, insofar as we distinguish between Plethon's social identity as an Orthodox layman in a Christian world and his intellectual identity as creatively manifested in the *Nomoi*, the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *Differences*, and the *Memoranda*. But nothing authorizes us to thus subordinate individual intellectual identities to collective social convention, or suppress the philosophical significance of dissent.⁷⁶ It is important to bear in mind that (a) participation in the Synod of Florence is neither a necessary nor a sufficient basis on which to argue that Plethon was

⁷⁶ Hladký (2014: 263, 278) assumes that the *Nomoi* are "a kind of exercise book" or "game" and that Plethon was not a pagan, but an unorthodox Christian. On the contrary, Carabă (2010: 230) correctly identifies the catechist intention of the *Nomoi*, one relative to "a religion in the genuine sense of the word," insofar as Plethon provides a doctrinal core, a confession of faith, and a cultic/liturgical part accounting for hymns and prayers.

Christian in the sense that Scholarios and Mark Eugenikos were; Plethon may well have supported the Orthodox cause out of patriotism or expediency; (b) there is no internal evidence in the *Nomoi* indicating that their author was *not* sincerely committed to the pagan worldview that he was himself presenting as truthful; (c) Scholarios, Matthew Kamariotes, and George of Trebizond are three contemporary witnesses to Plethon's sincere commitment to the paganism of the *Nomoi*, and there are others. For example, Plethon's exoteric student Hermonymos makes it sufficiently clear that "according to some" Christ was a mere *goes* (a "charmer" or "magician"), a clear allusion to the *Nomoi*.⁷⁷ Conversely, no contemporary source took the *Nomoi* as the work of an Orthodox Christian. Therefore, to rehabilitate Plethon to a vague and unqualified Christianity is uneconomic, for it requires a circular argument that simultaneously discards internal evidence as well as historical testimonies to Plethon's Hellenism, and favors an unreliable deduction (*non sequitur*), namely that only existentially committed Christians participated in the Synod.

Above all, the *Nomoi* become philosophically meaningful only as a sincere challenge to Scholarios' life-experience and thought-world. For example, Plethon's epistemology, ontology, and political philosophy are united by a typically Hellenic *idée fixe* with boundaries, finitude, and measure.⁷⁸ We saw that his divinities evolve from "Zeus" according to a closed schema of specified and hierarchically ordered procession. No random or accidental deviation (*παράτροπή* / *paratropē*) from *heimarmene* can be accounted for, as every "god" is organically and definitely linked to his or her predecessor.⁷⁹ Appropriately, Plethon's ontological system is rendered totally cognizable: truth is potentially comprehensible, even if concealed by this or that crooked historical trope. By default, his ideal *politeia* is totally realizable and finite too. At the opposite end of this intellectual spectrum we encounter Orthodox theology and apophaticism. Here it is as impossible to square God within human cognition as it is to reduce the Orthodox *ecumene* to the size of an ancient *polis* or an improvised *politeia*. The wild vine (*ἄμπελος* / *ampelos*) of Jesus Christ extends in unknown and unpredictable ways that transcend the rationally structured and controlled social engineering of Plethon's *phratRIA*. Just as Orthodox mysticism dissolves in depths of divine darkness, the Orthodox *ecumene* cancels out temporal and terrestrial boundaries; its sovereignty is spiritual rather than geopolitical.

Plethon, then, was a pagan insofar as he sought the passage out from mystical *apeiron* and divine darkness and into locality, finitude,

⁷⁷ Cf. Dedes 2009: 438 (with an edition of Hermonymos' text at 446–449); Demetracopoulos 2014: 199; Plethon, *Nomoi* 28, 36.

⁷⁸ Plethon, *Nomoi* 86: ἐν μέτρῳ τε αἰεὶ καὶ ὄρω τὸ μᾶλλον τε ὄν καὶ ἄμα κάλλιον τε καὶ ἄμεινον.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 71.

circumscription and limitedness. He replaced Christ as the Messiah with enlightened human law-givers, and he substituted a Promethean elation of the human soul for the Christian humility of redemptive anticipation. In a nutshell, Plethon conforms to the archetype of Ulysses who is guided by the nostalgic impulse to return home and regain control of it. Scholarios opts for the archetype of Abraham who leaves his fatherland and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the initial point of departure.⁸⁰

On the other hand, the *Nomoi* manifests the great antinomy of utopian thought. It is a political heresy that quickly degenerates into a new orthodoxy, an exception from the norm that claims its right to become a new norm. Utopianism is commonly the product of an individual man's schismatic thought, asphyxiating in a shattered world. Yet utopian thought may quickly grow intolerant to anomaly and dissonance and eventually eliminate the probability of further schisms. Thus, the apotheosis of reason in book 1 of the *Nomoi* announces Enlightenment rationalism, at the same time that the penal measures proposed in book 3 recall the darkest corner of the medieval era, at times surpassing even the initiatives of Plato's "Nocturnal Council."⁸¹ The reasoning seems to be that if the *politeia* sketched is nearly ideal or absolutely necessary owing to the state of emergency, it is unreasonable to accommodate shifts toward anything less than this ideal or necessity. Here Scholarios is on strong ground: who can blame Christian "sophists" like himself for casting to the flames a legal text that has a priori zero tolerance for their views and even sentences them to death by fire?⁸²

The *Nomoi* represents a threshold experience, a passage from a centuries-old, medieval, theocratic model to early modern ideology that inevitably utilizes a conceptual apparatus that is still quasi-theocratic. Plethon's intellectual experiment occurs abruptly and untimely: it is a hybrid that unavoidably exemplifies contradictory aspects of a world in transition between medieval and modern paradigms. And one way that Plethon's work becomes amphibious and liminal is precisely this unavoidable intrusion of dystopian gloom in an otherwise perfectly illumined utopia.

⁸⁰ Siniosoglou 2011: 417.

⁸¹ In *Nomoi* 124, Plethon proposes death by fire for homosexual intercourse and sex with animals (ἀρρενομιξία, θηριομιξία).

⁸² Cf. Scholarios, *Letter to Joseph* 4.170; Plethon, *Nomoi* 126.

CHAPTER 38

THE BYZANTINE LEGACY IN EARLY MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

PASCHALIS M. KITROMILIDES

BYZANCE APRÈS BYZANCE REVISITED

In 1935 Nicolae Iorga, the Romanian statesman historian, published a relatively short monograph, which, however, was to turn out to be probably his most enduring work. It appeared under the evocative title *Byzance après Byzance* and put forward the thesis that a considerable part of Byzantium's historical character lived on after the extinction of the eastern Roman empire in 1453. Byzantium's survival was embodied in institutions and cultural practices in southeastern Europe until the age of the French Revolution. This phenomenon of cultural continuity, adaptation, and survival Iorga called the "permanence of Byzantine forms."¹ Such permanence or survival could be seen in the adaptation of the Christian society of the defunct empire to the realities of the Ottoman conquest and its acceptance of the new political order as legitimate. The restoration of the patriarchal dignity of the Church of Constantinople and the survival of Greek as the lingua franca and official language of communication on a broad scale represented other aspects of the "permanence" of Byzantine forms. It was, however, the role assumed by the Orthodox princes of the Romanian lands that represented the most authentic survival of Byzantine forms. Byzantine imperial traditions were taken over by the Romanian princes already in the fifteenth century and clothed the new Romanian dynasties with an aura of grandeur and symbolism. The Byzantine imperial tradition was expressed primarily in the role of the Romanian princes as protectors and benefactors of the major institutions of the Orthodox Church, from the patriarchate of Constantinople and the Holy Sepulcher to the great monastic foundations of Mount Athos and Sinai. This is how Byzantium was recreated in early modern southeastern Europe, and lingered on as an evocation of legitimacy, grandeur, and correct practice until the Age of Revolution, when it was wiped out by the new forces of nationalism. Thus, the survival of Byzantium represented an interplay of ideas of political legitimacy, loyalty to religious Orthodoxy,

¹ Iorga 1935: 45–59. On Iorga's idea of "permanences" in history, see Elian 2003: 379–386.

and the reaffirmation of Greek culture as an integral component of the heritage of Christendom.

Eighty years since its original formulation, Iorga's idea of "Byzance après Byzance" appears capable of still eliciting responses from both scholarship and ideology.² The ideological responses could be considered weightier factors in the evolution of the historical self-awareness and the definition of identity in the societies of southeastern Europe. Yet the scholarly responses to Iorga's idea have also been of considerable significance, suggesting that it has been of great heuristic value in the elaboration of new approaches to historical interpretation and in opening up new fields of research such as the history of post-Byzantine law or painting. Thanks to the convincing force of Iorga's ideas, the human sciences have discovered that there are forms of Byzantium that lived on after the extinction of the empire as important constituents of the collective life and cultural expression of the Orthodox peoples of eastern and southeastern Europe, and beyond. One such form that lingered on and followed quite interesting and unexpected trajectories of adaptation and integration in other cultural traditions was the heritage of Byzantine political thought, to whose presence "après Byzance" the following pages are primarily devoted.

SURVIVALS AND ADAPTATIONS OF BYZANTINE POLITICAL IDEAS IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, although it had been fearfully expected for almost a century as a punishment of the sins of Christian society, did, when it came on 29 May 1453, involve a deep and painful reversal of the order of things ingrained in the conscience of Orthodox society. The Christian empire had been an integral component of that order as a protector of the faithful and of their Church and the Christian people since at least the seventh century: that was when the survival of the empire was linked to the intercession of the Mother of God on its behalf. The most eloquent record of this belief, which was cultivated and reinforced by Christian worship, was the Akathist hymn, a masterpiece of Orthodox hymnography, which called the Mother of God "the defender and commander" of Her City, Constantinople. It was She who had saved it from the Avars and Persians in 626 and on repeated occasions of enemy sieges subsequently.³ Since the eighth century, the Akathist had been chanted on the Fridays of Lent every year and represented one of the most popular services on the Orthodox calendar. In the twenty-third stanza, the Virgin is called "the impregnable bastion of kingship," while in one of the odes making up the canon that is sung prior to the Akathist,

² Kitromilides 2007a: xi–xv. ³ Herrin 1987: 199–200; Cameron 1978: 79–108.

She is supplicated to “preserve Her City from all capture by enemies” and again to spare the faithful “from barbarian capture.” It is interesting to speculate on the feelings stirred in the consciousness of the faithful by the recitation of these verses in the spring of 1454, when the city had been conquered by infidel new masters. What were the faithful to think about the divine repositories of their faith and hopes?

That was precisely the challenge the Church had to meet in its effort to reconstruct the Christian community and assure its survival under foreign and infidel rule. Two aspects of its strategy for survival involved the redefinition of political thought. The first concerned the placing of the ruling empire, which was no longer a Christian state, into the ideology of the Church, and more specifically into the order of worship and conception of legitimacy that was to govern the political existence of the Christian community henceforth. The second had to do with the incorporation of the eastern Roman empire into post-Byzantine historiography.

The conquest of Constantinople granted the new conquering empire which established its seat in the capital of the Roman empire an air of legitimacy in the eyes of its Christian subjects. This was confirmed in the conscience of the downtrodden Christian faithful by the teaching of their Church to the effect that the extinction of the Christian empire and its conquest by infidels represented divine punishment for their sins and the sins of their erstwhile Christian rulers, especially their submission to heresy through union with the Roman Church, which was actively supported by the east Roman emperor at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438–1439. Thus the new political order brought about by the fall of 1453 was made to appear legitimate and the Church could commemorate the non-Christian but now legitimate emperor in its services by defining him in relation to “lawful dominion” and the “common good to his subjects,” and urging those subjects to submit to him dutifully and whole-heartedly.⁴ He was no longer, however, called saintly and pious and Orthodox as the Christian emperor had been described in the official texts of the eastern Roman empire. By adjusting its terminology in these subtle ways, the Church could continue to pray for the king in the order of worship, even if the king was no longer a Christian prince.

Second, the new order established by the conquest could be rendered comprehensible by means of a new historiography, focused on the Church and transacted through ecclesiastical channels. The new historiography connected the Byzantine past with the Ottoman present of the Orthodox community in order to endow the enslaved Christian people with a meaningful identity that encompassed both the true faith and its historical contexts but also the realities of the present, whose recognition alone

⁴ Delikanis 1905: 94–95; Pitsakis 2007: 213–239.

could assure their survival. The Constantinopolitan branch of the new historiography comprised the two important historical accounts sent by his Greek correspondents to Martinus Crusius and published by him in *Turcograecia*. One of the two sources, *Historia politica Constantinopoleos*, recounted the decline and fall of the eastern Roman empire, emphasizing the sins of both the Orthodox Christians and their rulers, but also the failure of the western powers, led by the pope, to heed the desperate supplications for assistance coming from the east.⁵ The deeper message, however, came in the account of the favours bestowed upon the Christians and their faith by the conquering sultan, who restored their patriarchate and endowed it with privileges. Thus, the survival and reconstitution of the Orthodox community was connected to its Byzantine substratum that lived on as an institutional component of the Church, around which the community now cohered. The survival and reconstruction of the Orthodox community under Ottoman rule is told in the *Patriarchica Constantinopoleos historia*, which is a record of the reigns of patriarchs from the restoration of the patriarchate to the time of the publication of *Turcograecia* in 1584.⁶

However, the most articulate historical treatment of the Byzantine heritage as a component of the present of Orthodox society emanated not from the Constantinopolitan patriarchal environment but from the intellectual milieu of the Orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem. In the course of the seventeenth century, following the drama of the patriarchate of Cyril Loukaris in Constantinople and his flirtations with Calvinism, the substantive intellectual leadership of the Orthodox world was assumed by Jerusalem. A succession of great patriarch-scholars reigned on the throne of Holy Zion and all Palestine in the second half of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century: Nektarios (1660–1669), Dositheos (1669–1707), and Chrysanthos (1707–1731). They took the lead in the restoration of the cohesion of the Orthodox community and the healing of the wounds left by the conflicts over Cyril Loukaris' valiant and desperate attempt to reinvigorate the Church through an essentially secular strategy.

In his *Hierocosmic History*, Nektarios recapitulates the sacred history of the holy places, focusing primarily on his own monastery, Sinai, and pointing to the deep biblical lineage of those places and their early Christian heritage that was kept alive by the faith and devotion of monks under Muslim rule.⁷ When it came to disputes in the present among

⁵ Th. Zygomalas[?], *Historia politica Constantinopoleos*, in Crusius, *Turcograeciae libri octo* 1–43.

⁶ M. Malaxos[?], *Historia Patriarchica seu Ecclesiastica post Constantinopolin a Turcis expugnatam*, in Crusius, *Turcograeciae libri octo* 107–184.

⁷ Nektarios of Jerusalem, *Ἐπιτομή τῆς Ἱεροουσιμικῆς Ἱστορίας* 75–128.

ecclesiastical authorities there was always a safe method of resolution: an appeal to the legitimacy of Byzantine precedent, an edict or a document of the Orthodox emperors of the eastern Roman empire and specifically to the greatest among them (in the author's judgment): Justinian I, founder and protector of Sinai.⁸ In this way, Nektarios suggests that there were ways of surviving the conquest as Orthodox Christians and preserving the traditions of Roman legitimacy in the conscience and practice of the Church. In his treatise on the authority of the pope, published posthumously by his successor Dositheos, Nektarios considers the gradual emergence of the difference between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople already in the early Byzantine centuries, and points to the ideological and cultural alienation between the two worlds of Christendom.⁹ His narrative of the cultural and spiritual background to the schism allows the role of political ideology to come into view by examining theories of authority, the relations between secular and religious spheres and between earthly states and the city of God, and the papacy's claims of total dominion over emperors and kings in the west and over the entire episcopacy of the Church, east and west.¹⁰ Of special interest in this work is the treatment of the structure of ecclesiastical government, which extends its purview to the political regimes of nations and kingdoms. The critical prism through which all his historical material is considered, including Byzantine precedents of just or unjust government, is supplied by the author's concern for the survival of the Orthodox Church.

It was the greatest of the patriarchs of Jerusalem in this period, Dositheos, who became the foremost leader of the reaffirmation of Orthodoxy in the later seventeenth century, through his indefatigable pastoral activity and breathtaking travel throughout eastern Europe and the Ottoman empire, and as far as Georgia, but also through his impressive scholarship. In all of his writings, in the evocatively titled volumes of his anti-Latin trilogy published at Jassy and Rimnic (1692, 1698, 1705),¹¹ and in his posthumously published history of the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Dositheos systematically appeals to Byzantine ecclesiastical and political precedents as models for safeguarding legitimacy and canonical order in the present. Dositheos and other post-Byzantine authors could conclude

⁸ *Ibid.* 141–154, 176–181.

⁹ Nektarios, *Πρὸς τὰς προσκομισθείσας θέσεις παρὰ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις φρατῶρων διὰ Πέτρου τοῦ αὐτῶν μαϊστορος περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησης* 5–36, 187–215.

¹⁰ Nektarios, *Πρὸς τὰς προσκομισθείσας θέσεις* 211–212.

¹¹ Dositheos [Notaras] of Jerusalem, “Ἀωνοῦμου κατὰ Λατίνων,” in *Τόμος Καταλλαγῆς* 30–57, 87–195, and “Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός,” in *Τόμος Καταλλαγῆς* 267–273. Cf. Dositheos “Ἰστέον” and “Ἱστορία τῆς αἰρέσεως Βαβυλῶν καὶ Ἀκινδύνου,” in *Τόμος Ἀγάπης* 1–114. See also his introductory note to *Τόμος Χαρῶς β’–γ’*. On Dositheos see Todt 2002: 659–720; Russell 2013: 71–82. Dositheos himself supplies an interesting record of his travels in “Περὶ τοῦ πόσουσ τόπουσ ἐπεριπατήσαμεν ἔωσ ἀρτί” 302–307.

that, even though the Christian *ecumene* was ruled by the emperors of New Rome, the holy priesthood did not come absolutely and unconditionally under their sway.¹² Apparently they preferred an idealized picture of equilibrium between imperium and sacerdotium in the eastern Roman empire, overlooking the tensions that repeatedly plagued this dualism from the time of John Chrysostom onwards. Dositheos, as the leading exponent of this view in post-Byzantine times, extolled in detail the work of emperors such as Constantine the Great and Justinian to the extent that they had been supporters of the clergy “in confirming and enhancing Orthodox faith.”¹³ The image of just government in Byzantium was rounded up by the enumeration of intellectual virtues in the case of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, who was hailed not only as a lover of Christ but also for his contribution to the revival of outer wisdom, θύραθεν παιδεία (*thyrathen paideia*, including rhetoric, philosophy, and all the sciences) through his support of leading scholars and intellectuals.¹⁴ Imperial government of this nature came directly under the supervision of God, to whom alone the βασιλεύς (*basileus*) was answerable.

Thus a model of Orthodox secular rulership was produced by reference to Byzantine precedent, and this was addressed by ecclesiastical statesmen such as Dositheos to the only surviving Orthodox bearers of princely power in the broader Ottoman world, the rulers of the Danubian principalities. The patriarch of Jerusalem elaborated this model of princely government in an address to prince Ioan Lupu, son of the great prince of Moldavia Vasile Lupu, who, according to Iorga, had established, through his financial support, a formal protectorate over the Orthodox patriarchates in the Ottoman empire.¹⁵ Dositheos sketches a model for the Orthodox wielder of power by recycling all the rhetorical *topoi* used in Byzantine parenetic literature: the Orthodox prince ought to be a man of profound Christian faith and devotion to the Church, following the example of emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, an example particularly popular to post-Byzantine Orthodox authors. All those east Roman emperors shared some common features in their exercise of power, most salient of which in the eyes of their hieratic post-Byzantine admirers were war on heresy and protection of the Church. This was the model the Romanian rulers were expected to emulate as Orthodox princes claiming the legitimacy of the Roman tradition.¹⁶

¹² Nektarios of Jerusalem, *Ἐπιτομή τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας* 54; Dositheos, *Ἱστορία περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις πατριαρχευσάντων* 217–219; Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, *Συνταγματίον περὶ τῶν ὁφικίων, κληρικῶν, καὶ ἀρχοντικῶν τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῆς σημασίας αὐτῶν α'–γ'.*

¹³ Dositheos, *Ἱστορία περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις πατριαρχευσάντων* 218–220. ¹⁴ *Ibid.* 743–744.

¹⁵ Iorga 1935: 166.

¹⁶ Dositheos, “Ἐγχειρίδιον κατὰ τῆς καλβινικῆς φρενοβλαβείας” 458–470.

This ideological stance was considerably strengthened in the Danubian principalities by the massive recovery of Byzantine parenetic literature and the selective rendering of several important texts into vernacular Greek toward the end of the seventeenth century. One of the main protagonists in this project of cultural recovery and transmission was Sevastos Kyminitis, a neo-Aristotelian scholar who had been trained at the Patriarchal School in Constantinople and taught there before returning to his native Trebizond, where he founded the famous *Phrontisterion*, a school of higher learning that survived in the Pontic capital until 1922. Sevastos' next move was to the Princely Academy of Bucharest at the invitation of prince Constantine Brancoveanu. In Bucharest, Sevastos implanted the Neoristotelian philosophy of Theophilos Corydaleus but also engaged in the paraphrase of political texts by Synesios and Agapetos but also Isocrates into modern Greek, addressing them to his patron prince Constantine Brancoveanu as manuals of just princely authority.¹⁷

The manuscript tradition of these paraphrases shows how important they were in providing a philological basis for the elaboration and enrichment of what was aptly characterized as the "Byzantine ideal" in the political tradition in the Romanian lands, between the sixteenth and eighteenth century.¹⁸ The "Byzantine ideal" was not limited to learned intellectual forms. It was actively pursued as an integral part of the exercise of princely power and policy and cultivated through the strong and deeply evocative symbolic associations of Orthodox rulership. These associations were perceptively noted by Iorga long ago and have been documented in greater detail and precision by subsequent research.¹⁹ The main component of policy from this perspective involved the relations between prince and Church, which replicated or were expected to replicate the old model of the relations between emperor and patriarch in Byzantium, but it was mostly the munificence of the Romanian princes toward the patriarchates and the great monastic foundations of the Orthodox world, especially Athos and Sinai, that appeared to confirm in practice the Byzantine ideal in the eyes of the faithful. The striking ceremonial of the confirmation and coronation of the princes by Orthodox prelates or the ecumenical patriarch himself following the rituals of imperial coronations in place since the fifth century provided the major symbolic source of their legitimacy.

One additional but critical factor that cemented the Byzantine ideal in the political tradition of the Romanian lands was the incessant military campaigns of the greatest Romanian princes against Ottoman incursions in

¹⁷ Kitromilides 2007b: 3–5. These sources are recorded by Papadopoulos-Kerameus in Hurmuzaki 1909: β'-κστ', 211–247. See also Kaisarios Dapontes, "Ιστορικός Κατάλογος," p. 191. For more details, see Kitromilides 2015: 44–50.

¹⁸ Pippidi 2001: 85–97. ¹⁹ *Ibid.* 50–77.

the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These heroic struggles, especially the triumphs and tragedies of the campaigns of Stephen the Great in the fifteenth century and of Michael the Brave at the end of the sixteenth, seen as expressions of Orthodox military resistance to the Ottoman advance, invoked dramatically and convincingly in the collective conscience the Byzantine “crusades” against the Turkish onslaught on the Christian empire.²⁰ The most eloquent visual evidence of this entire symbolic configuration that gave Byzantine culture a posthumous life is supplied by the depiction of Romanian princes as founders, benefactors, or protectors in the iconography of churches and monastic foundations not only in their own domains but also at Mount Athos and elsewhere.

The strong basis of legitimacy provided by Byzantine symbolic associations to post-Byzantine Christian principedom lingered on during the Phanariot period (1711–1821), when princely authority in the Danubian principalities passed to the Greek families of the Phanar (the district where the ecumenical patriarchate was located in Constantinople). These appointees of the Ottoman Sublime Porte carried on the symbolism of earlier Byzantine political tradition, which had been established by their Romanian dynastic predecessors, as a means of sanctioning their own legitimacy. The psychological authority of the princely tradition in turn provided a protective aura which covered its internal transformation in the age of Enlightenment from the ideal of Christian monarchy to that of reforming absolutism. It was this transition to a conscious espousal of a modernizing agenda that brought the lingering residue of Byzantine political symbolism to its end.²¹

THE BYZANTINE IDEOLOGICAL LEGACY IN RUSSIA

The Orthodox world in early modern Europe was not limited to the survivors of the erstwhile Roman empire. It extended far beyond those communities into eastern and northern Europe, to the “regions of Orthodox Russia,” as Sevastos Kyminitis noted in the prologue of one of his works.²² It is clear from this allusion to the fledgling great Orthodox power of northern Europe that post-Byzantine thought was quite aware that something important was happening in those cold regions. Although Iorga limited the configuration of *Byzance après Byzance* to the Greek and Romanian worlds within the Ottoman empire, there can be little doubt that Byzantium’s greatest successor in the Orthodox world was Russia.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 97–134, 205–215, 262–273.

²¹ Kitromilides 2013: 29–35, 152–154; 1992: 167–182. On the Phanariots and their relation to the Byzantine heritage see also the reasonable appraisal by Patrinelis 2001: 177–198.

²² Sevastos Kyminitis, *Δογματική διδασκαλία* 3.

The centrality of Byzantium in the formation of Russian culture and spiritual self-consciousness has been extensively documented in pertinent scholarship, which has occasionally ascribed an excessive role to what is perceived as Byzantine influence in diverse components of the Russian historical experience, tracing it even in traditions of aggression or totalitarianism. All this needs to be tempered by measured historical criticism, but there can be no dispute over the fact that Russia's religious life, art, and thought in the late medieval and early modern period were shaped fundamentally by Byzantium and by the Orthodox tradition that was shared and zealously guarded by both. Furthermore, Russian political thought in the early modern period was to a considerable extent modeled on a reelaboration of Byzantine imperial symbolism to suit the aims and needs of Russian absolutism.

Let us start at the beginning. There can be little doubt that Russia as a civilization, as it has been understood by itself and by others in modern history, was the product of the conversion of Vladimir in 988 and the transformation of the people he ruled into an Orthodox society. That symbolic act of spiritual rebirth shaped the future destiny of the Rus' and then Russian people through their multiple political transformations. Russian society was educated in Orthodoxy by Byzantium. This made it a very important part of what has been called "Byzantine Commonwealth," which denoted an ideological, not a political historical entity, united by a common religion and acknowledging Constantinople as its spiritual centre.²³ Byzantium may have transmitted to Russian society its religious culture and its strong attachment to Orthodoxy, but it did not transmit to it those elements of its own culture, such as its secular literature or the heritage of Greek classics, which were to shape in the future the culture of European humanism. For long centuries, only religious texts and canon law were selected for translation and transmission from Byzantium to Russia, and this has amounted to keeping the converted Russians and other Slavs in a "cultural ghetto" until that secluded culture began to be penetrated by western influences.²⁴

In its political thought and models of government, medieval Russia was primarily influenced not by Byzantium and the sources of eastern Roman imperial legitimacy but by Mongol models, which were brought by conquest and the subsequent Mongol overlordship over the Russian principalities.²⁵

²³ The term is owed to Obolensky 1971. It has been commented upon by scholars of Byzantine culture and eastern Europe, e.g. Shepard 2006: 3–52, esp. 6–14.

²⁴ Mango 2008: 958–960.

²⁵ Among an extensive literature see Dvornik 1962: 362–388, esp. 374–380; Pipes 1974: 74–79. Alef (1995: 9–27) questions the primacy of Mongol influence, points to the instrumentalist uses of Byzantine models, and suggests that Russian autocracy was primarily shaped by local conditions and native traditions.

The one political lesson the Russians learnt from Byzantium – and this through the medium of ecclesiastical channels – was that the Orthodox Church, around which Christian society cohered, could exist only under the protection of a Christian emperor, whose power alone could secure the purity of faith from heresy. The importance of loyalty to the emperor as a guarantee of Orthodoxy had been stressed by the patriarch of Constantinople Antonios IV in his letter to grand prince Vassili I of Muscovy in 1395.²⁶ This remained a deeply ingrained belief that determined the future of Russian political thought. The Synod of Ferrara-Florence and the submission of the imperial Orthodox Church to Rome in 1438–1439 brought about a perception of the emperor of Constantinople as a champion of the union of the Churches and therefore as a traitor to Orthodoxy, and thus lay at the root of a deep crisis and new turn in Russian political theory. Following these developments, which included the adherence to union of the head of the Russian Church himself, metropolitan Isidore of Kiev, the Russian princes saw themselves as the only champions and protectors of Orthodoxy among Christian rulers.

The consequences of this realization were reflected in the initiative to replace the unionist Isidore, who had fled to Rome, with a Russian prelate, elected locally by the Grand Prince Vassili II and the Russian hierarchy. That step, however, was not taken until 1448, when metropolitan Jonah was elected. As late as 1452, on the cusp of the fall of Constantinople, the Russian prince wrote to emperor Constantine XI requesting imperial approval of the new appointment. It could have been merely a courtesy to the shadow of the moribund Roman empire, but the gesture suggested that the sense of legitimacy attached to the emperor's place in the Orthodox commonwealth was still felt to be binding as far as canonical order was concerned.²⁷

The disappearance of the eastern Roman empire in 1453 left Russia as the only sovereign Orthodox power in the Christian world and posed the problem of endowing Russian absolutism with some of the symbols of legitimacy associated with Byzantium. The main authorities on Russian history and political thought in this important transitional period are unanimous in their judgment that Russia did not see itself as an heir to Byzantium despite the shared Orthodox religious tradition, nor did Russian absolutism in any sense attempt to model itself on the precedent of the Orthodox empire of New Rome.²⁸ Most arguments supporting such an identification were anachronistic backward projections emanating from

²⁶ The letter is translated in Barker 1957: 194–196. On the significance of these ideas for Russian political thought, see Dvornik 1962: 227–228; Pipes 1974: 223–245.

²⁷ Meyendorff 1991: 45–51; Majeska 1988: 19–31.

²⁸ See references in n. 25. Also Ševčenko 1996: 92–109; Hösch 1969: 6–17.

nineteenth-century romantic ideologies such as Slavophilism or, even later, manipulations of the historical record motivated by Cold War considerations and misperceptions.

What did happen, nevertheless, was that Russia gradually took on Byzantine symbolism and elaborated religious and historical legends that gave the Russian empire a Byzantine aura. An early instance of this can be seen in the symbolic trappings that were adopted by Ivan III, grand prince of Muscovy, following his marriage to Zoe Palaiologina in 1472. The idea of this marriage was the brainchild of cardinal Bessarion, originally the metropolitan of Nicaea, who, like Isidore, had gone over to the Roman Church following the Council of Ferrara-Florence. Bessarion's calculation was that such a marriage would be primarily attractive to the Russian prince on account of the bride's Byzantine imperial lineage (being the niece of the last emperor Constantine XI). In fact, it could primarily serve the interests of the Church of Rome, it was thought, because the princess had converted to Catholicism as an exile in Italy and could, it was hoped, exercise her influence on her future husband to convert him and his country to Catholicism. Such a development would of course involve a major triumph for the Church of Rome by incorporating the major Orthodox country in Europe into its fold. Bessarion's plan was adopted by pope Sixtus IV, who arranged the marriage. Zoe, however, was baptized in Moscow and was renamed Sophia upon her re-conversion to Orthodoxy. So the papal plan for the conversion of Russia remained unfulfilled. Following the wedding, however, Ivan III adopted some Byzantine imperial symbols: he introduced the double-headed eagle on his seal, while his metropolitan of Moscow Zosima (1490–1494) began to refer to him as "New emperor Constantine of the New Constantinople."²⁹

Meanwhile, the fall of Constantinople was interpreted by the metropolitan of Moscow Jonah in 1458 as divine punishment for the apostasy signified by the union of 1439, and this was connected with a new charge placed by God upon the Russian prince as protector of Orthodoxy.³⁰ It was this background that primarily lay behind the emergence of the two most famous and most misunderstood legends concerning the transfer of Byzantium's mantle as guardian of Orthodoxy to Russia. The one legend was that of the "White Cowl," which was in fact a Slavonic version of that other imaginary construction, the *Donatio Constantini*, whereby Rome was claiming not only ecclesiastical primacy but predominance over the secular states. In the Slavonic adaptation, dated to around 1500, a White Cowl had been given to pope Sylvester by Constantine the Great as a departing gift upon the removal of the capital from Rome to Constantinople. When Rome fell into heresy, the White Cowl was transferred miraculously to

²⁹ Dvornik 1962: 372. ³⁰ *Ibid.* 265.

Constantinople but pope Sylvester instructed patriarch Philotheos in a dream to send it to the archbishop of Novgorod, where Orthodoxy was to be safeguarded in complete purity until the end of time.³¹ In this version of the theory of *translatio imperii* we witness first and foremost an expression of intra-Russian religious struggles for primacy between Novgorod, Kiev, and Moscow. The ecclesiastical struggle was amplified into a broader claim on behalf of the rising power of Muscovite Russia, which had just affirmed its independence from western and eastern rivals and former suzerains, and acceded to sovereign imperial status based on its newly found role as protector of the true faith. The White Cowl is still worn by the patriarch and the senior metropolitans of the Russian Church obviously as a symbol of a lingering claim of religious primacy in the Orthodox world.

The other legend that surfaced shortly after the story of the White Cowl was the idea of Third Rome. In this case too we are dealing primarily with a question of religious legitimacy, which eventually spilled over into political agendas. In the years between 1510 and 1540, the monk Filofei of Pskov addressed his famous letter to prince Vassili II, son and successor of Ivan III, announcing that, after the collapse of Rome and New Rome under the weight of their sins, a Third Rome had risen as a repository and protector of true faith until the end of time. This was an apocalyptic project, not a political one, announcing that Moscow was not only the Third but also the last Rome and calling the grand prince to repentance and piety in view of the Second Coming.³² This has been repeatedly interpreted as a political project, especially by Russia's rivals in European power politics, but also by various strands of Russian imperialists and fundamentalists. But the idea of the Third Rome in its original formulation could be seen as a religious reaction to the ruthless secular state-building policies whereby the Muscovite sovereigns were trying to solidify their hold on their empire following Machiavellian Renaissance models.³³

In 1547, Vassili II's son and successor, Ivan IV, whose ruthlessness was to earn him the eponym "The Terrible," was crowned emperor (tsar) employing a ceremony inspired by Byzantine imperial ritual. Upon assuming the imperial crown, however, he did not also assume the title "emperor of the Romans" as would have been required by *translatio imperii* or by a political understanding of the theory of "Third Rome." Instead, he called himself "emperor of all the Russ," signaling the advent of a new Orthodox

³¹ Majeska 1988: 22–23.

³² Meyendorff 1991: 49–50. The idea of Third Rome has elicited an extensive and often excessive literature but the subject has been reduced to its proper historical proportions by the research, most recently, of Ostrowski 1998: 219–243; 2007: 170–179; also Poe 2001: 412–429.

³³ Ivan the Terrible is attested as "an avid reader of Machiavelli." See Meyendorff 1991: 51. On the background, see Dvornik 1962: 314–316.

empire, not the continuation of the defunct Roman empire. While affirming his own sovereign status, autonomous power, and independence, Ivan IV nevertheless did not neglect the additional strength that religious legitimacy could also bring to his imperial position. He sought, therefore, the formal recognition of his title by the Great Church of Christ, the repository and guardian of Orthodox legitimacy and canonicity, by sending lavish gifts to the patriarch of Constantinople Ioasaph the Magnificent (1555–1565). After some hesitation, patriarch Ioasaph acceded to the request, recognizing the tsar's legitimacy as a descendant of princess Anne, wife of St. Vladimir, and sister of the east Roman emperor Basil II.³⁴

The coronation of Ivan IV was a characteristic and also supreme moment of the ideological uses of the glamour of Byzantium as a source of legitimacy for the entire community of Orthodox believers. A century and a half later, the same respect for the norms of legitimacy and canonicity emanating from Byzantium and guarded by the ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople dictated the appeals of Russian authorities to patriarch Jeremiah II (1572–1579, 1580–1584, 1585–1589), in connection with the elevation of the Russian Church to patriarchal status.³⁵ Jeremiah traveled to Moscow in 1588 for this purpose and, at the request of tsar Feodor (1584–1598), installed in January 1589 the metropolitan Job of Moscow as “Patriarch of Moscow and all Russias and of the Northern-most regions,” sanctioning by his presence the transfer of Orthodox legitimacy, whose guardian was Constantinople, to the new patriarchate.

The spiritual heritage of Byzantium survived in Russia as an integral component of the country's Orthodox religious identity. The Orthodox Russians never forgot that they had received their faith from Byzantium and that the sources of the true faith were Greek. Even during the “time of troubles” in the seventeenth century, patriarch Nikon declared “I am a Russian but my faith is Greek.”³⁶ Later in that century, the great patriarchs of Jerusalem, whom we have already encountered as protagonists of the restoration of Orthodox self-confidence in the areas under Ottoman rule, also assumed the role of “spiritual mentors” of Russia through extended evangelizing tours of the Russian domains.³⁷ The “de-Byzantinization” of Russia began with the reforms of Peter the Great and the turn to the Enlightenment under Catherine II. Yet even in this later

³⁴ Meyendorff 1991: 49–50.

³⁵ Hannick and Todt 2002: 551–615, esp. 568–576; Gedeon 1996: 407–413, esp. 407–408. On the relations of imperial Russia with the Church of Constantinople in subsequent centuries, see the perceptive comments by Gedeon 2010: 217–242, containing a rather severe criticism of Jeremiah II on p. 242.

³⁶ Meyendorff 1991: 55.

³⁷ Papadopoulos (1907) discusses mostly the activity of patriarchs Paisios, Nektarios, and Dositheos. See also Kitromilides 2007c: 7–9.

period of reform, westernization, and rationalism, Feofan Prokopovich turned, in his treatise *Justice of the Monarch's Will* (1722), to Scripture and to Byzantine authorities besides natural law when convincing arguments in support of monarchical power as divinely ordained were needed, in order to argue that absolutism is willed by God.³⁸ Russian imperial designs and claims on Constantinople, Mount Athos, and the Holy Land later on used the appeal of Byzantium and Orthodoxy as legitimizing covers but had nothing genuinely Byzantine, let alone Christian, about them in a world of power politics and ruthless struggles for domination.

BYZANTINE RESONANCES IN ANCIEN RÉGIME EUROPE

The appeal of Byzantium as a source of Roman legitimacy and norms of correct practice in the transaction of the tasks of a Christian monarchy was not limited to the Orthodox world. It may appear somewhat surprising to the uninformed observer of European history but Byzantium made a recognizable comeback in the political thought of *ancien régime* western Europe as a component of the theory of absolutism. The clearest case of this rediscovery or, in Gilbert Dagron's formulation, "return" of Byzantium to western Europe is perceptible in seventeenth-century France.³⁹ That return was unmistakably an integral part of the elaboration of the political theory of absolutism. Independently of political motivations, the return of Byzantium had important consequences, reflected in the expansion of the canon of political thought and the growth of erudition and learning.

On the level of political thought, the return of Byzantium was registered in a reawakened interest in the forgotten Byzantine discourses on kingship, primarily in the work of Agapetos the Deacon. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Agapetos was extensively quoted in the speeches of the *procureur général* of the French crown before the Parlement de Paris.⁴⁰ More significantly, however, king Louis XIII patronized a translation of Agapetos from Latin into French in 1613, obviously as a step in consolidating the theory of divine right monarchy, which was in the making at the time.⁴¹

The French sovereign's interest in the political literature of the eastern Roman empire found an even more revealing expression as well. In the syllabus drawn up for the instruction of the dauphin, the future Louis XIV, a number of Byzantine royal manuals were included, besides the standard sources of ancient Greek and Roman moral thought (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Pliny) and the works of the foremost theorists

³⁸ Jones 2010: 76. ³⁹ Dagron 2007: 141–158. ⁴⁰ Church 1941: 266.

⁴¹ Kantorowicz 1981: 499.

of absolutism. These Byzantine manuals included the treatise *Remonstrances de Basile*, a French translation of the counsels in sixty-six short chapters given by the emperor Basil I to his son, the future emperor Leo VI. Originally planned for the use of Louis XIII himself, this work is claimed to have been the first book to be put in the hands of Louis XIV as a child. The royal syllabus also included the manual *Instruction royale* of emperor Manuel Palaiologos addressed to his son John and precepts from Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos.⁴² It was also deemed appropriate for the dauphin to be instructed in the history of the emperors of Germany and Constantinople.⁴³ It was on the basis of such readings that Louis XIV developed his understanding of the nature and duties of kingship, appreciating that “absolute power is not arbitrary power” and that the prince is shepherd and father to his people,⁴⁴ as taught by Byzantine political thought from Synesios and Agapetos to Theophylaktos of Ohrid and Blemmydes.

This was the intellectual background of the uses that Louis XIV made of Byzantium and its history in promoting his own domestic and foreign policy. Domestically the king wished to impose his authority as “emperor,” that is absolute sovereign over the recalcitrant aristocracy. To this end, his claim to the imperial heritage of the Latin emperors of Constantinople provided a potent ideological argument. In terms of foreign policy, Louis revived the ambitions of France’s eastern policy as part of his kingdom’s imperial projects. His eastern policy inspired Leibniz’s 1672 plan for a conquest of Constantinople by means of a military expedition via Egypt. The *translatio imperii* to the French monarchy fed the idea of a crusade in the popular mind, as reflected in an extensive literature voicing the “just claims of the king of France to succeed to the ancient emperors of Rome as well as of Constantinople.”⁴⁵ These oriental imperial ambitions of the Sun-King reveal, as Dagron aptly put it, a “symbolic architecture” that, based on the desirability of recovering a link between west and east, provided a context for the exploration of the extent and splendor of royal power, which at the time was producing European modernity.

This “symbolic architecture” of royal power had one important consequence for the history of European erudition: it provided the motivation for the initiation of the imposing collection of Byzantine sources, the famous *Byzantine du Louvre*, which became the most concrete and lasting achievement of the imagined reconquest of the Byzantine east. Initiated in 1645, it continued until 1819, producing fifty-seven volumes of Greek and Latin texts,⁴⁶ whereby modern Europe was reconquering the knowledge of

⁴² Lacour-Gayet 1898: 24–26. ⁴³ *Ibid.* 108. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 455–465.

⁴⁵ Dagron 2007: 147–148; 2012: 762–765.

⁴⁶ Auzépy and Grémois 2001: 70–80; Dagron 2012: 765–767.

the Byzantine Middle Ages. The *Byzantine du Louvre* found its way as far as the library of prince Constantine Brancoveanu in Bucharest, providing the Orthodox dynastic guardians of the Byzantine heritage with a clearer cultural self-awareness.⁴⁷ This project also set in motion a campaign to collect manuscripts from the Greek east by means, first, of the missions of the Cypriot scholar Athanasios Rhetor in the 1640s and later of those of Jean Michel Vanslebe on behalf of the Royal Library, between 1671 and 1674.⁴⁸ These expeditions greatly enriched the French royal collections with Greek manuscripts and sustained the growth of palaeographical and historical erudition, reaching its apex with the indefatigable activity of Charles Du Cange and his prodigious production of editions of source materials and dictionaries. How the erudition accumulated in the *Byzantine du Louvre* aimed at sustaining the imperial ambitions of the Sun-King becomes obvious in the address to the king with which Du Cange opens his edition of Villehardouin's *History of the Empire of Constantinople under the French Emperors* in 1657. In that text the editor is urging the king to claim his rightful inheritance of the throne of Constantinople, which the evidence of history and his dynastic titles attached to his crown.⁴⁹ Du Cange's work was carried on by the great palaeographers Mabillon and Montfaucon. These researches and editorial projects made France the heart of the emergence of Byzantine studies and palaeography in modern Europe.

This project of source criticism and publication provided the foundation for the first major appraisal of the eastern Roman empire in modern European thought, Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et leur décadence* in 1734. The sources made available by the *Byzantine du Louvre* provided Montesquieu with the evidence that sustained his critical examination of Byzantine history in the last four chapters of his *Grandeur des Romains et leur décadence*. Montesquieu treated Byzantine history as the foremost example of historical decline, an interpretation propagated polemically by Voltaire and canonized in western historiography later on by Edward Gibbon.⁵⁰ These developments, however, involved the eventual rejection of Byzantium as an opprobrium of European culture. The new attitude marked the end of the survivals and adaptations of Byzantine intellectual residues in early modern Europe.

⁴⁷ Pippidi 2006: 471–496, esp. 480; for more details, Dima-Dragan and Caratașu 1967: 443–444.

⁴⁸ Auzépy and Grélois 2001: 65–66. On Athanasios Rhetor, see Kitromilides 2002: 92–95.

⁴⁹ Auzépy and Grélois 2001: 18. See Haran 2000: 302–307, 202–211 on the earlier history of French claims concerning the *imperium translatum ex Graecos in Francos*.

⁵⁰ Runciman 1977: 53–60. On Gibbon's admiration and reliance on Montesquieu and his judgment of Byzantium, see also Trevor-Roper 2010: 135–139, 157–158.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CAG</i>	<i>Corpus Aristotelicum Graecum</i>
<i>CCAG</i>	<i>Catalogus codicum astrologorum Graecorum</i>
<i>CPG</i>	<i>Clavis patrum Graecorum</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EO</i>	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>JöB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell and Scott, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th edn., rev. S. Jones. Oxford 1925-1940
<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , ed. A. Kazhdan. Oxford 1991
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (ed. J.-P. Migne)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (ed. J.-P. Migne)
<i>PLP</i>	<i>Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et mémoires</i>

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